

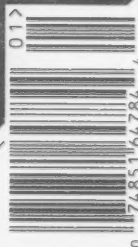
CJR

COLUMBIA
JOURNALISM
REVIEW

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2004
\$4.95/CANADA \$5.95

LITTLE MURDERS

The Death of Dangerous Art



THE BLADE

One of America's Great Newspapers

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 11, 2012

IN TOLEDO, OHIO

A BLADE INVESTIGATION

BURIED SECRETS BRUTAL TRUTHS

A four-part special report
examining one platoon's atrocities
in Vietnam and how the U.S. military
concealed them from the American public



Tiger Force soldiers search for bodies during the Son Tay Valley in 1967. The photo shows a platoon member. The unit conducted an annual search of areas where the bodies of victims were buried in secret mass graves.



Kim Thai walks through a Son Tay Valley field in 1967, where his father, Kim Cong, and other farmers were killed by Tiger Force soldiers. He was 10 years old.

Elite unit savaged civilians in Vietnam

It was on a clear, bright day in 1967 that a Tiger Force platoon, made up of 12 soldiers, was engaged in a search of a Son Tay Valley field. The soldiers were looking for bodies of victims of the war. The soldiers were looking for bodies of victims of the war. The soldiers were looking for bodies of victims of the war.

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STORIES BY MICHAEL D. VALLER, NITEN WEISS, AND JOE BARR. ■ BLADE STAFF WRITERS

From Toledo to Vietnam



Reporters from The Blade uncovered the compelling story of Tiger Force, a U.S. Army platoon that slaughtered hundreds of unarmed civilians and prisoners in the Central Highlands of Vietnam in 1967. The U.S. government kept the story buried for more than three decades. The Blade uncovered the truth.

BURIED SECRETS, BRUTAL TRUTHS

A FOUR-PART BLADE INVESTIGATION

Read it on toledoblade.com



Clockwise, from left: Woman and daughter on the balcony of one the few wooden structures to survive the U.S. invasion of Panama. In the highlands of the Srpska Republika, a deaf woman has a word with U.S. soldiers. Haitian man knocked unconscious with the butt of a M-16 rifle wielded by riot police. Presidential candidates wave to onlookers in the streets of Colon, Panama.

U.S. foreign policy hasn't focused on the aftermath of military victories. Our journalists did.

The United States has shown it can achieve swift military successes abroad, most recently in Afghanistan and Iraq. But these U.S. interventions don't necessarily lead to stability, law and order, and budding democracies. America's record over 100-plus years of nation building is mixed – from success in Grenada, to mixed outcomes in Panama and the Balkans, to little effect on the chaos in Haiti.

Reporter-photographer teams from the San Antonio Express-News spent seven months analyzing the status of recent nation-building efforts by the United States. The result was "America's World: The Record on Regime Change," an unprecedented newspaper series that examined the footprints left on four nations by the world's sole remaining superpower. By bringing readers a better understanding of complex world politics, Hearst Newspapers deliver excellence every day.



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Stewart Powell



Photographers
Nicole Frugé
Jerry Lara
Delcia Lopez
Edward Ornelas
Gloria Ferniz



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CJR

"To assess the performance of journalism ... to help stimulate continuing improvement in the profession, and to speak out for what is right, fair, and decent"

—From the founding editorial, 1961

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Critiques of political coverage often arrive too late to have much impact, but CJR will take a shot at changing that dynamic this time around. Coming soon: **CJR Campaign Desk**, via our Web site at www.cjr.org.



A DEATH IN BAGHDAD

The 3rd Battalion lost one of its own in April on the edge of the Nahrdayala Canal. A marine was killed after a mortar round landed on an armored assault vehicle.

COVER: © RALPH STEADMAN
www.ralphsteadman.com
ABOVE: KIT ROANE/SIPA



CJR OPENING SHOT

Seeing the Real War

Chances are you never saw this photo. No U.S. outlet published it. The face of death, even one that appears almost serene, is all but taboo in our press, especially when the face is American. Nor are you likely to have seen many of the bloodier war photos that we perused for this space, the kind that put gaping wounds at eye level. After Vietnam our government limited press access to war, but that has been less true this time around, when some restrictions seem self-imposed. Our society, shaped by geographic and cultural isolation, sees the world through a lens of technological wizardry that at once shrinks it and gives us greater discretion to choose how and when we engage with it. And our media companies have a powerful interest in a news report that goes down well with the morning oatmeal. As CJR goes to press, the capture of Saddam can be seen over and over again (and is big news indeed), but visuals of maimed Americans and Iraqis cannot. The point of seeing such

images, Susan Sontag writes in *Regarding the Pain of Others*, is not shock or guilt. They are "an invitation to pay attention, to reflect, to learn, to examine the rationalizations for mass suffering offered by established power." A job for the press.

War photography and editorial illustration are different planets, but they orbit the same visual sun. And the self-censorship described above is not unrelated to the self-censorship explored in our cover story, "Little Murders," by Jesse Sunenblick. Also in this issue, Trudy Lieberman figures out why interviewees no longer feel compelled to "Answer the $ Question!" and Neil Hickey handicaps the great New York tabloid war. Gal Beckerman visits an American Jewish newspaper that talks back to the Jewish establishment and Eric Umansky introduces a Palestinian pollster who won't play Arafat's game. And more. We hope you enjoy it.

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COVER: © RALPH STEADMAN
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CJR

Published by the Columbia University
Graduate School of Journalism
Dean: Nicholas Lemann

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Journalism Building
2950 Broadway
Columbia University
New York, N.Y. 10027

On the Web: www.cjr.org

Columbia Journalism Review (USPS 0804-780) (ISSN 0010-194X) is published bimonthly. Volume XLII, Number 5 January/February 2004. Copyright © 2004 Columbia University. Subscription rates: one year \$27.95; two years \$41.95. Periodical postage paid at New York, N.Y. and at additional mailing office. **Postmaster:** send Form 3579 to Columbia Journalism Review, P.O. Box 578, Mt Morris, IL 61054.

CALLING THE GAME

Matthew Miller's excellent article, "Charade '04: A Tyranny of Symbols," quotes the *Washington Post's* executive editor, Leonard Downie Jr., thus: "Our role is to continue to cover important situations like the S and L crisis, the health-care crisis, et cetera. But it is not our role to tell the politicians what it is they're supposed to discuss during a campaign." Downie's claim is disingenuous in the extreme. The *Post's* obsessive driving of the Whitewater semistory surely told politicians that fiery smoke was roaring out of Bill Clinton's Arkansas. As a result of shoddy reporting in both the *Post* and *The New York Times*, the national agenda was easily hijackable. No surprise, it was hijacked, never mind that there was nothing to Whitewater but foam.

TODD GITLIN
Professor of journalism and
sociology
Columbia University
New York, New York

I was grateful for Richard Wald's article on "Charade '04: The Triumph of the Image" (CJR, November/December), since I have for some time believed that, with enough pictures that show him walking briskly and waving, just about anyone can get elected to anything and be named Man of the Year to boot.

I have seen no mention of this anywhere, but here in California, my local television station (KEYT-TV), needing ever more visual images of Arnold Schwarzenegger during the last weeks of the recall campaign, opted to splice in segments from his ads. Thus, while the verbal portion of the program dealt with charges of improper behavior, the visual

image showed Arnold before an adoring focus-group-sized throng.

WILLIAM A. BAKER
Santa Barbara, California

EXCEPTION NOTED

In his comprehensive, thoughtful review of the Duranty dispute ("Should This Pulitzer Be Pulled?," CJR, November/



December), Douglas McCollam wrote, "No one, it seems, both reported the depths of the famine and managed to stay inside the Soviet Union."

One New York City reporter did. He was Ralph Barnes, Moscow correspondent for the *New York Herald Tribune*. He was the subject of a biography by the Oregon historian Barbara Mahoney, *Dispatches and Dictators: Ralph Barnes for the Herald Tribune*, published in 2002.

According to Mahoney, Barnes's famine report from Moscow appeared in the August 21, 1933, *Trib* under the headline, MILLIONS FEARED DEAD OF HUNGER IN SOUTH RUSSIA. The Soviet regime responded by refusing to allow Barnes to travel outside Moscow until November. Barnes remained in the Soviet

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Who

fought for a quality
education for their
children?

Who

went to jail in order
to ride the public
buses?

Who

changed the law to
gain access to
the vote?

Who

has created more
change in America
than any other
group in the last 2
decades?

People with
disabilities -
54 million of us.
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of America.



Putting a face on the
people who are changing
the face of America.

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BODYGUARDS AND THE PRESS

Do hired guns make journalists safer — or less safe?

BY NEIL HICKEY

Bullets from AK-47 assault rifles smashed into two Toyota Land Cruisers bearing Brent Sadler, a CNN correspondent, and his crew through the northern Iraqi city of Tikrit. Gunmen in a pursuing car aimed their weapons at point-blank range and prepared to fire again. Sadler decided that death “would come in an instant.”

But it did not. The driver of CNN’s vehicle was a hired “security adviser” — a rugged ex-soldier who’d served in Britain’s elite Special Air Service Regiment, the famed SAS. Steering with his left hand, the man grasped a Heckler and Koch MP5 machine pistol with his right, leaned out the car window, and loosed a stream of nine-millimeter bullets at the pursuing brigands, who fell to the rear and disappeared from sight.

Sadler was delighted to have survived, but expected he might be criticized. Had he and his team crossed a line and become combatants, thus possibly endangering other journalists? It’s a question that bedevils news managers, as journalists continue to work in danger zones where hostile fire, kidnapping, thievery, and muggings are part of a day’s work. Under the 1947 Geneva conventions and the 1977 Additional Protocols, journalists on the battlefield are considered civilians and cannot be directly targeted — unless they take action that makes them participants rather than witnesses.

But in conflicts of recent decades — Somalia (where seven CNN staff members were killed), Afghanistan, and now, Iraq — some journalists, especially on the television side, have been accompanied by armed security guards authorized to return fire if attacked by an enemy. Those guards are employees of companies that offer the expertise of former commando-type soldiers to news organizations to protect their journalists in the field.

One rationale for the hiring of armed guards is that guerrilla action, of the sort now ongoing in Iraq, draws no distinctions between military and nonmilitary targets, with even the Red Cross and the U.N. coming under attack by insurgents. Western journalists are easily identifiable in Iraq, and there’s a rising apprehension among them that they’re in the crosshairs more than in any previous conflict, despite the capture of Saddam Hussein. At least sixteen news people were killed in Iraq in 2003. On December 10, two *Time* journalists were wounded by a grenade hurled into their Humvee. (Virtually no print or radio news outlets employ bodyguards.) Some journalists are considering carrying weapons. TV crews, with their cameras and sound gear, are especially vulnerable.



At a broadcast journalists’ conference in Budapest in November, the pros and cons of employing armed guards came in for vigorous discussion. Representatives of some European news organizations argued heatedly that the presence of outside security people in battle zones is unhealthy for the news-gathering process, and in fact endangers all journalists because it blurs the line between reporters and combatants. In the heat of battle, the argument goes, nobody consults a copy of the Geneva conventions.

No consensus emerged from the Budapest talks, according to Ann Cooper, executive director of the Committee to Protect Journalists, who attended. Vehement views were expressed on both sides. One participant complained that news organizations that hire guards “are making a decision that affects all of us” — empowering hostile forces to conclude that journalists are part of the fray and thus fair game.

Proponents of hiring armed guards insist they understand the hazards and counterarguments. “It does raise the bar when you put armed guards with journalists,” admits Eason Jordan, the CNN executive who runs the network’s scores of overseas bureaus. “In the eyes of the bad guys it can suggest that all journalists are armed.” But there’s little alternative, he believes. Twice in 2002, Saddam Hussein’s minister of information issued threats to CNN’s Jordan: if the network sent news teams to Kurdish-controlled northern Iraq, those journalists would be assassinated. In March, just before the ground war began, the Kurdish intelligence service in Erbil, a northern city where CNN had a staff of thirty, arrested a hit squad of Iraqis from Baghdad who confessed they’d been sent to murder the CNN team. Jordan is contemptuous of news organizations that say, “We’d hire armed guards, but we can’t afford them.” Those companies, he insists, should not be sending their journalists to risk death in the world’s most perilous regions.

Security forces, say their defenders, are more than hired gunslingers. They assess threat levels day by day, recommend safety measures, and provide survival training for TV crewmembers. The cost of such service, reportedly, is high. Marcy McGinnis, senior vice president of news coverage for CBS News, who oversees the network’s worldwide news-gathering operation, says “It’s beyond expensive.” But she adds, “I have sleepless nights” thinking about staff members in Iraq, “and I’m determined to do everything possible to ensure their safety.” ■

Neil Hickey is CJR’s editor at large.

CHANN RICHIE



LAUREL for not going gentle into that editorial night, to:

VIRGINIA GERST, editor of *Diversions*, a section that appears in twenty-seven editions of the weekly *Pioneer Press* in suburban Chicago. Ordered to run an appetizing restaurant review concocted by the paper's marketing director to tempt the eatery's owner — and erstwhile advertiser — who reportedly had expressed distaste for an earlier review that was something less than a rave, Gerst raised strong ethical objections to no avail. And so, Gerst quit.

DAN COOK AND SHARON DEBUSK, editor and managing editor, respectively, of the Portland, Oregon, *Business Journal*. The *Journal's* interview with the local Planned Parenthood's CEO was already at the printer when Craig Wessel, publisher of the *Advance Publications* weekly, stepped in and killed it. As reported by *Willamette Week*, Wessel's stated objection to the

LAUREL to **BOSTON** magazine, for doing its homework, and then some. Now that the church has begun to rid itself of those who prey on children, can the state be far behind? Not very, if *Boston* magazine has anything to say about it, which it unequivocally did in its October issue. Based on records obtained after a legal battle with the Massachusetts Department of Education, the article, "Teachers' Dirty Looks," documented the alarming presence in the system of teachers with criminal records of rape, indecent assault, child pornography, and sexual harassment. More alarming still are the inexcusable loopholes in the law that permit, even encourage, that presence. In twenty-seven states, for example, sex between a teacher and a sixteen-year-old student is illegal — but not in Massachusetts. In forty-two states, applicants for teaching jobs are subjected to nationwide criminal background checks by the FBI — but not in Massachusetts. (The Bay State confines its check to arrests or convictions that occurred only within its borders, effectively offering a convenient school playground to molesters from neighboring states.) And in such other state agencies as those that oversee doctors and lawyers, officials have the power to issue subpoenas — but not in Massachusetts's Department of Education, which lacks that tool so vital to investigations of abuse. Almost before the ink was dry, a state senator had convened a task force, the *Globe* was reporting on the debate the article raised, and the *Herald* was editorializing on the "Glaring Schoolhouse Gap" exposed by the city magazine.

LAUREL to **THE BLADE**, in Toledo, Ohio, for cutting through the fog of war and time and secrecy. Thirty-six years after an elite forty-five-man U.S. Army platoon in tiger-striped uniforms arrived in the jungles of Vietnam on a search-and-destroy mission aimed at "out-guerrilling" the fierce guerrilla enemy, the paper undertook a daunting mission of its own: to investigate allegations, never before publicly aired, that many members of that "Tiger

Force" unit had committed unthinkable atrocities against unarmed Vietnamese civilians. The result, eight months in the making and drawing on thousands of classified and unclassified records and scores of interviews with former Tiger Force soldiers as well as witnesses in Vietnam, was a four-part series published in October. Its title, "Buried Secrets, Brutal Truths," did not exaggerate: in a perverse definition of a "free-fire zone," platoon members shot down elderly farmers in their fields, beheaded a baby, kicked out the teeth of dead civilians to grab the gold, tortured and executed prisoners, strung human trophy ears on shoelaces to wear as necklaces. Almost as shockingly, findings of official inquiries disappeared into Army archives, and with the help of the Nixon administration, the war criminals got away with it. That is, until now.

GERSON BORRERO, editor-in-chief of *El Diario/La Prensa* in New York, the nation's oldest Spanish-language daily. After three of Borrero's colleagues sent to the paper's new Canadian owners a petition they had circulated among Cuban exiles in Miami protesting a scheduled op-ed piece on education by Fidel Castro — the first of a series solicited by Borrero from the presidents of Latin American countries — the owners killed the piece. And so, Borrero quit.

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DART to the **ATLANTA JOURNAL-CONSTITUTION**, for exhibiting symptoms of journalistic malaise. A September 24 article on the paper's Web site (since revised), in which the paper reported that two students at the University of Georgia had been hospitalized with a tentative diagnosis of meningitis — one viral, one bacterial — was almost a perfect reprint, word for carefully chosen word, of a press release put out by the university. Although a quick and simple Google search could have helped the paper educate readers about some of the particularly relevant, if not particularly reassuring, facts about the deadly bacterial form of the disease — for example, the transmission rates for college students, the rates for dorm residents, the fact that it can be transmitted by kissing, and the rate of fatalities — the paper bypassed that opportunity. What it did add to the UGA press release was this: "By Kelly Simmons, Atlanta Journal-Constitution Staff Writer."

Darts & Laurels is written by Gloria Cooper, CJR's deputy executive editor. Nominations: gc15@columbia.edu, 212-854-1887.

Mr. Jennings's Medal

A content analysis claims that ABC was "antiwar." What does that mean?

A study of television news coverage of the war in Iraq says ABC's World News Tonight was the most antiwar — far more than CBS, NBC or Fox.

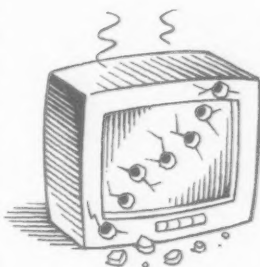
— USA Today, September 9

Antiwar? What are we to make of that word, exactly? For starters, it brings to mind a twelve-year-old study on press coverage of the Catholic Church by the Center for Media and Public Affairs, the same outfit that did the study mentioned above. The findings then: press coverage is anti-Catholic. The center, which works to maintain a neutral image, did not use exactly those words but did frame its findings with a discussion of anti-Catholicism in America. And the sponsors of the study, the Knights of Columbus and the Catholic League, had no trouble characterizing it as confirming "everything most people sense about media bias against the church," as a league official put it.

But to dig beneath the scientific-sounding mumbo in that study was to discover an Alice-in-Wonderland logic that essentially weighted as anti-Catholic bias any coverage of dissent and debate within the church. In an opening explanation of its methods, the study reprinted a straight news story about an outspoken priest/intellectual who was being silenced by the Vatican. The piece quoted the priest and described some of his controversial opinion. The center then explained its analysis: "The data we collected on this story would show that it presents a debate over Church policies on internal dissent, that the Church's policies are criticized, and that the Church is characterized as oppressive." Really. We wonder what the center would have reporters do? Edit away the priest's view that a church that silences him might be oppressive? Ignore the significant and interesting ferment inside the Catholic Church? Real journalists would advocate precisely the opposite.

Which brings us to the "antiwar" label the center now hangs on ABC. The center this time studied ABC, CBS, NBC, and Fox, from the missile strikes on Baghdad March 19 through the fall of Tikrit on April 14. It measured the "tone of coverage in terms of opinions expressed on the war, on the administration's policies, and on the military's performance." Fox came out "arguably the most prowar network" overall, and ABC came out at the other end of the spectrum.

The center did not release the underlying data for these findings, just a summary with a few examples. But the examples shed light. Of the people ABC quoted about the administration's policy on the war, "fewer than two out of every five," had "evaluations" that "were positive." What was



deemed "negative?" The example given was a quote from an Iraqi plaintively asking ABC's John Donovan why the U.S. forces weren't more helpful to his wife and children, who were without food and medicine.

About the military effort, ABC's quotes were 56 percent "positive," according to the study, which put the network well behind Fox (78 percent), CBS (73 percent), and NBC (64 percent). But what the study deemed "negative" sounds suspiciously like a willingness to show the face of war. The

example: the ABC reporter Martha Raddatz translating an Iraqi civilian's anguished April 8 complaint: "My neighbor and my wife died here. Because of Americans, there are three families that are all under the rubble." According to the study, ABC ran almost three times as many stories with images of civilian casualties and twice as many stories with images of military casualties as Fox. In addition, the center points out that ABC "gave voice to the complaint that the U.S. was handling civil unrest poorly on fourteen occasions" in the final days of the war, whereas "that viewpoint never appeared on Fox." *Never appeared.*

The center carefully avoids spelling out conclusions, but an unspoken implication drifts off the report like vapor — that some kind of mathematical "balance" between "negative" and "positive" quotes constitutes a rough measure of truth.

We don't think so. The job of the press in wartime is to show the real course and nature of the fighting as best it can, and that has much to do with dried blood. And when an administration — rightly or wrongly — embarks on a radical preemptive war policy that is opposed by most of the world, the journalist's job is to make sure that dissent and debate about that policy and its implementation are fully aired. This war was sold on the idea that the U.S. should strike first before Iraq handed around weapons of mass destruction to al Qaeda terrorists, that Saddam was a global terrorist, not just a regional thug. But it looks as if Iraq had no WMD to pass out even if it had been inclined to do so. It also becomes clearer every day how terribly botched was postwar planning. The debate now is about how to salvage this deadly mess and leave Iraq more stable and less dangerous than it was before.

ABC's viewers will likely be more prepared to take part in that debate and less likely than viewers of other networks to have been surprised by what has developed since the fall of Tikrit because, despite the pressure to be a cheerleader, *World News Tonight with Peter Jennings* was more probing during the war than its rivals. The center's antiwar label is looking like ABC's red badge of courage. ■

KEVIN MAZUR

CJR CURRENTS

Journalists in Colombia who do stories on kidnap victims are criticized by colleagues who believe that interviewing hostages legitimizes the kidnapping industry by treating it as just another beat. Reporters who seek these interviews, critics say, can become instruments to further the captors' goals (most kidnappings are about ransom, but increasingly the kidnappers use hostages as political leverage for prisoner swaps with the government.)

Defenders of the kidnap interview argue that it is not only a legitimate story but also an important one, since in Colombia 3,000 people are abducted each year. In addition, they say, interviews with hostages can offer families the only proof that their loved ones are still alive. That was the case when the Colombian journalist Jorge Enrique Botero gained access to three American defense contractors held hostage by leftist rebels after their plane went down in guerrilla territory in February. The July interview aired on *60 Minutes II* nearly three months later.

In the videotaped meeting, the captives greeted Botero warmly and seemed at ease. But when the captives asked the government not to attempt a military rescue, it was unclear whether they were speaking freely or had been coached by their captors.

Botero says that's up to the public to decide. "I don't believe in ethics codes that say one should not cover certain parts of reality," he says.

The freelance reporter Ruth Morris was herself kidnapped along



THE VICTIMS: U.S. civilians (from left) Keith Stansell, Marc Gonsalves, Thomas Howes on *60 Minutes II*

CAPTIVE COVERAGE

Who wins? Victim or kidnapper?

with the photographer Scott Dalton when they were on assignment for the *Los Angeles Times* in January. She says it's clear that rebel kidnappers always have ulterior motives for granting interviews with their captives: "Colombia's kidnappers don't give out information about their victims to make everyone feel better. They usually do it to improve their negotiating position."

Freelancer Karl Penhaul's 2001 interview with the Scottish oil worker Alistair Taylor may have been instrumental in securing Taylor's release after two years as a captive. "It was

clear that negotiations had all but broken down," says Penhaul, who spent four months trying to convince rebel commanders to allow the interview. "In Britain everybody had just forgotten about him. This was the chance to see kidnapping from the other side."

Penhaul sold a series of exclusive stories to the Scottish tabloid *The Daily Record*, *The Boston Globe*, and *The San Francisco Chronicle*, and video to CNN and the BBC.

Six weeks later, Taylor was freed after a ransom was paid.

For Peter Y. Sussman, who helped write the code of ethics for the Society of Professional Journalists, the problem is not in doing the interview, but in how the story is told. "If it's telling only one side of the story or promoting the interest of captors, then it's wrong," he says. "But to say we'll never do such interviews would be a disservice to the public."

— Sibylla Brodzinsky



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LANGUAGE CORNER

DO NOT HASTEN TO BID

The picture showed a uniformed man hugging a woman, and the caption said he "bid farewell to his wife." One way or another, "bid" wasn't a great choice.

If the publication's captions are normally in the present tense, "bids" was the word. If they're regularly in the past tense, the better choice was "bade."

"Bid" is an unusual verb in that its past tense varies with context (the present tense is always "bid"). For financial matters, literal or figurative, the past tense is "bid" — at the auction, she bid on the painting; he bid for a role in the production. "Bid" is also the past tense for what bridge players do.

Some prefer "bid" for all occasions. But for greetings and partings and commands, "bade" is preferable — the prime minister bade the president welcome, they bade us adieu, she bade him go and never darken her door again.

Maintaining profoundly artificial differences like those between "farther" and "further" is silly (CJR, November/December 2002). Preserving the age-old difference between "bid" and "bade" is rather nice, somehow. Modestly, forgivably erudite.

— Evan Jenkins (ejenk35@aol.com)

A lot more about writing is in Language Corner at CJR's Web site, www.cjr.org.

TECHNOLOGY CORNER

www.stateline.org

When the legendary political reporter David Broder first told Dale Russakoff about Stateline.org, "it was if someone had figured out exactly what I needed," she says. Russakoff, who has covered state financial crises for the national staff of *The Washington Post*, often turns to Stateline.org in doing her research. "Until you see how financial constraints are playing out across the states," she says, "you can't get the big picture of how this affects the country."

Stateline.org provides that big picture by combining reportage of major state issues with a digest of stories from roughly 140 news sources. The eight journalists on staff track trends and do stories that have become must-reads for local officials and researchers.

The site allows you to do comparative analysis, using Census and other data. For example, you can compare two or more states (and the national stats) on education, environment, health care, taxes, and more. Russakoff also praises the site's summaries and links to studies from nonprofits and think tanks.

Depending on how overloaded you — and your inbox — are, you can sign up for a daily e-mail alert or a weekly roundup of the site's highlights.

— Sreenath Sreenivasan (sree@sree.net), who teaches new media at Columbia, offers his tips for journalists at SreeTips.com.

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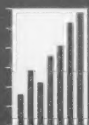
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THE AMERICAN NEWSROOM

Ira Glass

This American Life

Chicago, Illinois

PHOTO BY SEAN HEMMERLE

SPEAKING IN TONGUES

You're only as good as your translator



LOST IN TRANSLATION: Seyhmus tried to be helpful

BY RUSSELL WORKING

Seyhmus is a craggy Turkish Arab with blow-dried hair and vigorous gestures that he employs to cut off the ramblings of others less interesting than himself. He is not, I believe, a stupid man. I hired him as my interpreter in Diyarbakir, Turkey, last February, and we were hoping to cross into Iraq and head to a conference in the Kurdish enclave. In a taxicab dense with cigarette smoke, we sped through a snowstorm toward the border. We passed military outposts guarded by armored vehicles and wound our way through the ancient citadel town of Mardin. Earlier, I had expressed interest in the thousands of trucks abandoned along the roads in this region, idled by United Nations sanctions against Iraq. Now Seyhmus considered it his duty to point them out whenever they caught his eye. "Trucks," he would say. "Yes, I know," I replied.

Southeastern Turkey was swarming with foreign correspondents in advance of the Iraq war, and every interpreter and schoolteacher who could conjugate an English verb seemed to have been snapped up by other journalists. So I was paying \$100 a day to a tour guide who, after twenty-seven years of living in Hamburg, had apparently concluded that English and German were interchangeable. Seyhmus never understood me the first time I said anything, so through repetition I distilled each thought to an essence he got, most of the time. Once when I inquired about the time of my flight the following Sunday, he made a quick call on his mobile phone and announced, "Okay, I done. I cancel your billet." It cost me \$60 to get my seat back.

Oddly, though, I miss working with Seyhmus, and others like him. After more than six years of freelancing from Russia and the Middle East, I recently returned to the United States.

True, it is liberating to conduct an interview without an intermediary, but an interpreter embodies the adventure of reporting abroad. He becomes your voice and ears, your cultural adviser in a foreign land, smoothing over your faux pas, offering tips, for example, about Russian gangsters in Hokkaido or businessmen who sell ostriches from China to North Korea. (Seyhmus notwithstanding, most interpreters I have worked with have spoken good English.) A translated interview is interrupted by frequent pauses, but you come to appreciate a pace that allows you to observe your surroundings: the tarpaulin roof of a Palestinian refugee's home near Amman, the bales of hay on the roofs at the Birqash camel market near Cairo, the shabby suit coat of a North Korean guest laborer in Vladivostok. The interpreter often takes pride in reading the story you produce, and makes a handy fact-checker. And he illuminates an unfamiliar land.

Often they surprise you. Unexpectedly, I gained an insight into China and globalization when a long-haired interpreter who played in a rock band told me, "Just call me by my English name: Superboy." And whenever I think of Mongolia, I recall crossing the steppes with Gereltuv, a young man who advised my wife and me to stock up on flour, sugar, and cigarettes — gifts for the nomads we would interview about a killer winter that had decimated the nation's livestock. The weathered herders we found south of Ulan Bator would dismount their camels or scrawny ponies, crouch in the grass stubble and snow, and talk with Gereltuv. We visited the yurt of a herdsman named Gambaa and sat with his family around a potbellied stove while the women served us salted tea. The family's goat kids shared the dwelling so they wouldn't freeze to death in their first winter. The kids clambered onto the low table to nibble at a bowl of cheese Gambaa's sister-in-law, Gereltuya, served us.

We pinched off morsels that were unmarked by goat teeth. "You know, they probably have very little cheese after a winter like that," Gereltuv said. "It's an honor that they're sharing it with you."

"Tell her it's delicious."

"She says, 'Have some more.'"

My reliance on interpreters dates to January 1997, when I began editing an English-language biweekly in Vladivostok, a Russian port on the Sea of Japan. At the time I knew no Russian beyond glasnost and zek (a gulag prisoner); without a translator I was lost. At first I often worked with Sveta, a young, slender, hawk-nosed interpreter who tended to fall into conversation with sources and forget to translate. I would interrupt to ask, "Can you fill me in here, Sveta?"

"Just a minute," Sveta said, "I'm just trying to figure out what she's getting at." The discussion would continue until Sveta decided to bring me up to speed.

Yet Sveta also helped shed light on notorious elements of Russian society. From her habit of hanging out in casinos she knew mobsters, and several months after I arrived in Vladivostok, she took me to the funeral of a friend of hers, a Russian crime boss who had been assassinated. Afterward we joined a throng of mourners — a crippled don surrounded by bodyguards, gangsters with shorn heads, women in stiletto heels and black, backless dresses — as they tossed down vodka shots in a restaurant next door. Sveta grabbed my arm and

pointed out a nearby tough. "You see that man? He just told his girlfriend, 'That guy's wearing a blue shirt. That's disrespectful. I'm going to kill him.'"

I was wearing a dark blue shirt. "You mean me?"

"Who else?"

"Maybe we should go."

"It's up to you."

Vladivostok is close to China, a country I visited four times, and the Middle Kingdom presented problems all its own. Foreign reporters are not supposed to enter without permission, but even though I used tourist visas I had no trouble working when I explained that I was writing about business (I sometimes thought I could have written about the transplanting of executed convicts' organs if I'd said, "I just want to look at the business aspect"). I always sought translators through private or semiofficial contacts, but I had no illusions that the men and women who showed up at my hotel were independent. In

He becomes your cultural adviser in a foreign land

Dalian a reporter for *China Daily* directed me to a translator who used the English name Robert. He said he was happy to work for me free of charge; he wanted to practice his English, he explained. He even promised to find a car and driver. The next morning Robert arrived in a white sedan with no license plates and Chinese flags fluttering from the front fenders. In the end, the trip was a success, and Robert must have enjoyed the time together as well, for when I returned to Vladivostok, he asked me to go into business with him.

I promised to give a few of his cards to a businessman friend in Vladivostok.

Now the foreign adventure is over, for the moment, at least. I thought I was a pretty good reporter abroad, but my experience with Seyhmus taught me a lesson in humility: that a reporter in an alien land is no better than his interpreter, and when your conduit to a culture is unreliable, no amount of enterprise can make up for it. In prewar southeastern Turkey, wherever we stopped, Kurdish villagers would greet me with delight. "America!" they said. "You are welcome! This is America's village." But just as the interviews got started, Seyhmus's cell phone would ring and he would bark at our sources to hold it down.

That evening we interviewed some truck drivers along a dirt road in Cizre, and they invited

Seyhmus, our cabdriver, and me for dinner. Our arrival was an event for the whole neighborhood. Perhaps forty people crowded a two-room, concrete-walled home to gape at the American. As dinner arrived the women and children slipped out, and the men sat on cushions on the carpeted floor around a glowing oil drum, and we feasted on chicken, rice, yogurt, tomato and cucumber salad, and flatbread. We had settled back to sip sugary tea when Seyhmus bestirred himself and began hectoring the Kurds. Whenever they tried to speak he waved off their objections with the flat of his palm.

Eventually he explained. The Kurds had been complaining about their hard lot in life, and he could not abide whining. They were lazy, that was their problem. "I tell them, 'I am one Muslim, but I no wait for God help me. God no pay me. I work with my two hands.'"

Then he went at our hosts once again, arguing the way generals storm cities. I feared they might cut his throat, but the Kurds rolled their cigarettes with mild Iraqi tobacco and heard him out, possibly because, as they told

him, they regarded him as a rich man. After all, the American was paying him unthinkable rates just to chat.

The next day we reached the Iraqi border, where perhaps a hundred journalists from around the world milled about, waiting to cross over to the Kurdish region of Iraq and cover a conference in Erbil on Iraq's future. They clustered around the Turkish army conscripts, asking when we would be allowed through the border. But the Turks said it would be three days before they would let us through, and that would strain my freelance budget to the breaking point. Besides, several papers I wrote for already had staff reporters in Turkey.

Still, I hesitated.

Seyhmus was all for going to Iraq. He discovered something in his pocket and fished it out: a packet of nondairy creamer.

"Look," he said. "This have corn soup and phosfarts in it."

"Phosfarts?"

A brisk nod. "No good."

All the way back to Diyarbakir, as night fell across Turkey, Seyhmus kept pointing out dark shapes by the road. "Truck," he would say.

"Yes, I know," I replied.

Seyhmus nodded, happy, as always, to be of assistance. ■

Russell Working was recently hired as a reporter for the Chicago Tribune.

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ON THE JOB A MEAT STORY, WELL DONE



IN THE NEWSROOM: Cindy Gonzalez, Steve Jordon, and Jeremy Olson

How the *Omaha World-Herald* Inspected a Tough Local Industry

BY LAURIE KELLIHER

The cattle pens in the south Omaha stockyards are empty. The Livestock Exchange Building is being converted into apartments. These days Omaha calls to mind Warren Buffet as often as it does meatpacking, but the industry remains as much a part of the local identity as it does of the local economy. The indoor football team is called The Beef; its mascot, Sir Loin. The Greater Omaha Chamber of Commerce only recently retired the city slogan: *Rare. Well Done*. Nebraska is officially the Cornhusker State, but everyone here knows that corn is grown to feed the more than seven million head of cattle that are slaughtered in the state each year. The meatpacking houses have moved out to the countryside, to modern automated plants. It's a \$1.2 billion business.

When an E. coli breakout at a meatpacking plant prompted the *Omaha World-Herald* to run a five-part investigative series in 1997, the Nebraska Cattlemen association persuaded cattle auctioneers to pull their advertising from the paper and led an effort to cancel subscriptions. The *World-Herald* — an employee-owned, statewide newspaper with a 192,000 daily circulation — doesn't have a near competitor in Nebraska, but the cattlemen had their effect. "We still are taking heat and feeling the repercussions from that," says executive editor Larry King. So when an ambitious new investigative team led by Mike Reilly, an assistant managing editor, suggested another inquiry into the meatpacking industry,

there was an "implicit expectation that we were going to be very careful and very thorough," says Reilly.

Six nights a week, while Nebraska sleeps, Carlos and his co-workers sanitize an Excel plant that is caked every weekday with the blood and fat and guts of 4,400 butchered cattle. The workers spray burning chemicals and water. They scrub sprockets and belts. They remove meaty clogs from the floor drains. They work fast — they have to — because the plant can't whirl back into production at 5:30 a.m. unless it is spotless.

Carlos isn't his real name. It's the name the *World-Herald* used for an illegal Mexican immigrant who works as a cleaner in one of the state's largest meat-processing plants. Reporter Steve Jordon met with Carlos twice before he learned his actual name, so great was Carlos's concern about jeopardizing his job, even if it was a job that few documented workers would want.

Jordon's conversations with Carlos launched a ten-month investigation that involved three reporters, thirty Freedom of Information Act requests, eighty sources, and more than six hundred phone calls. The front-page story, which ran last October 12, detailed what was known to many people working in the plants: that while meatpacking is recognized as one of the nation's most injury-prone occupations, the men who clean up at night after the meatpackers have gone home are at even greater risk, pushed to work so hard and so fast that safety goes by the wayside. But because these cleaners are lumped into an industry category with office janitors and hotel maids, the true danger of their work has escaped the scrutiny of the Occupational Safety and Health Administration. And because the majority of the cleaners, like Carlos, are working with false documents, they don't complain about conditions that routinely lead to acid burns, crushed bones, amputated limbs. Sometimes to death.

Jordon has been a business reporter for the *World-Herald* for more than twenty years. He has a calm, intelligent



manner and a historian's knowledge of Omaha. His short white hair and dark suits lead colleagues to joke that undocumented workers must fear he is a Fed when they see him coming. He can list the flow of immigrant populations that have worked in the meatpacking plants over the years, from Czechs to Poles to Italians, and now, Hispanics. He knows the industry well, but what he learned in December 2002 when he met Carlos in a small aluminum-sided union hall, ninety miles from the newspaper's Omaha office and ninety miles from just about anywhere, was news to him.

Carlos works for a cleaning company that is subcontracted by the Excel plant, a common arrangement in the Nebraska meatpacking industry. He is paid to sanitize the plant, to clear out the meat left in the machinery, to hose the blood off the kill floor. If he cleans his area by the end of his seven-hour shift he receives a bonus. If he falls behind, even for a night, he can lose his bonus for the entire week. The pressure encourages Carlos and his co-workers to cut corners. They don't follow the time-consuming machinery-lock-out/tag-out procedure required by OSHA. As the *World-Herald* explained, "Locking out is the equivalent of turning off a light in your house by going to the basement, turning off the circuit breaker and inserting a padlock that prevents others from turning it back on." There isn't time for that.

"Move your ass," the supervisors have yelled at Carlos as he worked. They know that there are plenty of other immigrants who want these jobs, even at a starting wage of \$6.50 an hour. And Carlos thinks it would be tough to find a new job with his forged identity documents and limited English.

Jordon met Carlos a second time in a small house that Carlos rents near the plant, in a town where the five & dime and the bakery have been replaced by a taqueria and a Mexican grocery store. Carlos showed Jordon scars from burns he received working with cleaning chemicals, but asked that he not describe them in his story for fear they would identify him to his supervisors. Carlos talked Jordon through his shift, slowly explaining the routine of scrubbing conveyor belts, grinders, blenders, and bone cutters. He showed Jordon his pay stubs, evidence of the long nights he has clocked at the plant. Carlos provided critical information the *World-Herald* needed to begin its investigation, but he chose not to meet with reporters from the paper again after that. It was the first of many frustrations in getting illegal immigrants to participate as sources in the story. They want work that is safer and better paid, but cleaning is one of the few jobs available to them in the area. A local labor union official estimates that 90 percent of the people employed as cleaners in the Excel plant are Mexicans or Guatemalans working in the U.S. illegally. The Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services estimates — perhaps conservatively — that 25 percent of the meat-processing employees in Nebraska and Iowa are working with false documents. The influx of Mexicans to the area prompted the Mexican government to open a consulate office in midtown Omaha in 2001.

When Mike Reilly sent an e-mail to the investigative team outlining the criteria for a great project, he wrote, "Remember we're looking for greed, waste, death or all three." In the story of the meatpacking cleaners he found all three.

Reilly had recently appointed Jeremy Olson, a young reporter who had distinguished himself in an exposé on Nebraska's child



BILL BARSCH/OMAHA WORLD-HERALD

A meatpacking cleaner shows his scars

'... we're looking for greed, waste, death or all three'

mental-health-care system, to the investigative team. Olson became the lead reporter and writer for the meatpacking cleaners story. Jordon gave Olson the notes he had taken in his conversations with Carlos. It was now Olson's job to quantify what they knew anecdotally. The hardships of the meatpacking cleaners had been mentioned in Eric Schlosser's *Fast Food Nation*. They were discussed in local union halls. But how many others did Carlos represent, what was the extent of the danger, and why was the situation being overlooked by regulators?

Olson sent out FOIA requests to twenty-five OSHA offices asking for the inspection reports of those cleaning companies that had received fines for lock-out/tag-out infractions and other violations. The reports he received back were chilling: *contract cleaner loses legs when a worker activates the grinder in which he is standing; cleaner loses hand when he reaches under a boning table to hose meat from chain; cleaner killed when hog-splitting saw is activated; cleaner dies when he is pulled into a conveyor and crushed*. Olson calculated that thirty people had died in packinghouse cleaning incidents in this country since 1987 and hundreds more had suffered severe injury.

Every year OSHA inspects industries with a high incidence



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of on-the-job injuries as calculated by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics — limited resources force the agency to play the percentages. But because the injury statistics for meatpacking cleaners are analyzed in a category separate from the meatpacking industry itself, their startling injury rate was diluted and failed to make its way onto anybody's radar.

It was ultimately Workers' Compensation Court files that provided Olson with the bulk of the information he needed to dig into the investigation. The files confirmed the scenes Carlos had described in the plant: *hand crushed in rollers when worker tried to catch a scrubbing pad that he dropped; worker cleaning table loses fingers in pinch point of a table; hand crushed between rollers and belt while wiping grease off machine.* Olson spent weeks creating spreadsheets that detailed the names of the cleaning contractors, their injured employees and the nature of the injuries. Stacked-up manila file folders crowded his small cubicle. In the end, he calculated that one in every ten cleaners working in the meatpacking industry will suffer a severe work-related illness or injury each year; that the meatpacking cleaners have an injury rate four times greater than those of the jobs they are grouped with; that meatpacking cleaners were more prone to severe injury than the meatpackers themselves.

What makes cleaning so dangerous is that it exposes workers to the "pinch points" of industrial plants. Bits of meat and grease stick to the teeth of grinders; they drip behind safety guards, and they dangle from gears and chains.

The safety barriers that protect daytime workers become impediments at night, because cleaners have to get around and behind them to thoroughly sanitize the plant.

The files also provided Olson with the telephone numbers and addresses of hundreds of injured cleaners. He called every one. Where no phone number was listed or the phone number was no longer valid, Olson, along with Cindy Gonzalez, an experienced immigration reporter, knocked on doors. Often they would find groups of men sleeping on living-room floors together. They became more conscious of the hours the cleaners kept. They came to



Investigative editor Reilly

expect and understand their hesitancy to talk. The reporters had conversations back at the office with Reilly about their desire to spark reform in the industry without provoking a workplace raid that might result in deportations. In the end, they decided it was important to just get the in-

formation out there. They assured the cleaners their anonymity would be maintained, but could not guarantee that their cooperation would benefit them in the short term, or even the long. More than thirty cleaners agreed to be sources in the *World-Herald* investigation. The rest of the material Olson fleshed out through interviews with union officials, USDA officials, OSHA inspectors, meatpackers, meat-industry officials, attorneys, Hispanic advocates, civic leaders, and cleaning-company executives. Before the story ran, Olson took the unusual step of showing his copy to the primary sources he worked with to ensure he didn't unwittingly use a detail that would identify them. The cleaners were less concerned about the Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services — which has generally turned a blind eye to the situation of undocumented workers in the meatpacking industry — than about supervisors who would want to get rid of troublemakers.

When the story finally ran in the *Sunday World-Herald* sunrise edition the cleaners were no doubt still asleep. Few of them would have been able to read the story in English anyway. It was read closely by the local OSHA office, which, as reported in the *World-Herald* the following Sunday, contacted several cleaning companies and requested that they work with OSHA to create a new safety training program. A similar program set up in 2000 has reduced the number of injuries among daytime meatpackers. Jose Santos, the worker rights coordinator for the meatpacking industry in the Nebraska Department of Labor, confessed that when he read the story on-line, it was the first time he was made aware of the hazards afflicting the cleaners. He said he is grateful for the important investigation the *World-Herald* did and is now working closely with OSHA on the issue.

Nobody in the industry pulled any advertising. ■

Laurie Kelliher is an assistant editor at CJR.

Q & A

WEIGHING ANCHOR

As the start of his final year, Tom Brokaw takes stock and looks ahead

At the end of the 2004 presidential campaign, Tom Brokaw will retire as anchor and managing editor of NBC Nightly News, marking the first shift in a broadcast evening news anchor job in twenty years. Brokaw, sixty-three, covered his first presidential campaign in 1968. NBC Nightly News, the top-rated evening newscast for the last seven years, attracts ten million viewers a night, outranking ABC World News Tonight and The CBS Evening News. But all three programs today must compete for attention among a cacophony of increasingly partisan voices on cable, the Internet, and radio. Brokaw talked with Jane Hall about campaign '04, the future of TV news, conservative attacks on "liberal" media, the war in Iraq, and his plans for the future.

What are you aiming to do in your political coverage this time? It's early yet — but I think people want to get well beyond Washingtonspeak, beyond all the fine-print arguments to the larger issues of values and character and integrity and the big picture. I think there's a whole body of American voters out there who feel like they've been shut out of the process in some fashion. That's one of the things that I'm going to be keenly aware of this time.

The mainstream media initially missed the strength of Howard Dean's campaign. Was that because Dean was succeeding through the Internet — or because Dean's message was so strongly antiwar, and the conventional wisdom at the time was that such a message was suicide?

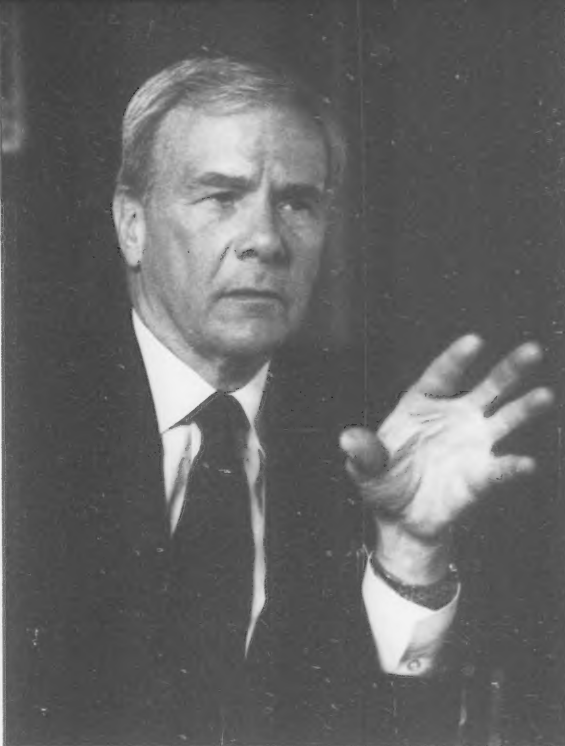
I think it was a combination of those things. I also don't think that you can discount the tepid response of Dean's opposition to his early gains — it gave him running room in a way that not even Dean could have anticipated. But this speaks to what's going on out there — which is that Dean is generating a new constituency of voters in the Democratic Party, and reaching them through the Internet. We're always a beat behind on that technology.

NBC is the only major broadcast network that has a cable-news outlet. How do you see MSNBC and NBC working together in Campaign 2004?

Well, I hope we'll be greater than the sum of our parts. Politics works really well for us.

Tell me how.

We'll be able to give two hours, for example, to the Democratic candidates' debates in Iowa and then in South Carolina in



PHOTOS BY GONN PRODUCE

January. They'll air live on MSNBC and then be repeated there in prime time. And then NBC News programming will be able to take great chunks out of those debates for NBC News programs such as *Nightly News*, and the *Today Show*.

But the debates won't be aired in prime time on the NBC network.

These debates will not be, but you know what? Cable penetrates 70 percent of American audiences now. People who want to find these debates can find these debates — it's not that we've put a wall around them.

This is where the world is today — there's a wealth of political news out there today, and people have many more choices.

What about the argument that these debates should be on broadcast because broadcast reaches most people?

You know what? When it gets down to the two candidates [the Democratic and Republican presidential nominees], it is on broadcast. But in these preliminary debates — the election is a year away — we're not even in spring training here yet.

When you've got Carol Mosley Braun and Al Sharpton and other candidates who are down there in the single-digit range, who are necessarily going to be involved in these debates, you're not going to get anybody to watch them on the network. I could put these primary debates on the Internet and have more viewers than I would if I put them on NBC, the over-the-air network.

But cable — which gets into a fantastic percentage of American homes — is there for the people who *want* to watch the primary debates. This is not state-run television. And the idea that there's not a wealth of political information — on the broadcast evening news programs, the *NewsHour* on PBS, the

Sunday shows, the weekend *Today* and *Good Morning, America* shows, all-news cable, CSPAN, the Internet — is just folly.

The Media Research Center, the conservative media watchdog group, has been getting a lot of attention for its reports alleging liberal bias in the media. They've been severely critical of Peter Jennings's and ABC World News Tonight's reporting before the war in Iraq — and their reports get a lot of pickup on the Internet, through e-mails and on cable talk shows.

Look, I've been dealing with this myself since the Vietnam War and the civil rights movement, when reporters were accused of having a liberal bias.

The fact of the matter is, if I don't establish a bond with the NBC News audience that is based on my credibility and my integrity, then I go out of business. We've been doing this for a long time. *NBC Nightly News* still has the largest single audience of any media outlet, print and electronic, in the news business. The simple test is that if people thought I had a bias, they wouldn't watch me.

'Every generation develops its own set of sources for information based on the evolution of technology'

What is the impact, do you think, of a steady drumbeat of such criticism? Does it not have an impact on the network?

It is a little wearying, but you've got to rise above it and take it case by case. Most of the cases are pretty flimsily made. I'm glad that Peter, Dan, and I have been doing this long enough that we're confident in our own abilities to withstand that. I understand the Rush Limbaughs of the world. I have less trouble with that. That's who he is and what he does — and he's very skillful at it. Rush has a strong point of view — and that's fine. What I get tired of is Brent Bozell [president of the Media Research Center] trying to make these fine legal points everywhere every day. A lot of it just doesn't hold up. So much of it is that bias — like beauty — is in the eye of the beholder.

So it hasn't impacted the way you cover stories?

No, it hasn't. We work very hard at trying to determine what the facts are on a weekly basis — and that's a full-time job. I don't have time to engage in some kind of a conspiracy.

You and Tim Russert had Rush Limbaugh on as an analyst in the midterm elections in 2002. Was that in any way an attempt to speak to the criticism from conservatives?

Rush Limbaugh is a powerful force in this country — and a smart guy. I watched him — he was invited to address the freshman class in Congress in 1994 when Newt Gingrich took hold of Congress. You know, Rush has gone to a different level.

Your conservative critics would probably say that you decided you needed some more conservatives on the air.

Well, they may say that. But I thought that we asked Limbaugh some difficult questions about the deficit and other policies, and it's worth hearing what he has to say about the election returns. If I were out there with a team of supersleuths, I could find, I suppose, a reason from day to day to find liberal bias one day and a conservative bias the next day on some given story.

So you don't see a liberal bias in the mainstream media?

No. Speaking generally, people who are drawn to journalism

are interested in what happens from the ground up less than they are from the top down. And they see that part of their role — which I think is appropriate — is to represent the views of those who are underrepresented in the social context or the political context and to make sure that they're not overlooked and that their wrongs get the bright light of journalistic sunshine. And therefore, because of the nature of what we cover, people may think that we're biased. But the fact is, that's part of the obligation of journalism.

Many of my students do not share my reverence for watching the broadcast evening newscasts. They get their news from a lot of different sources, including the Internet. Does it trouble you that we don't seem to be growing the next generation of viewers for broadcast news?

I'm thrilled that they have so many choices — and I think we in broadcast news have to earn our place in that spectrum of choices. Think of how happy you would have been in college, as a political junkie, as I would have been, with something like

the Internet. I could've gotten home from class in the afternoon — or when I slept in and didn't go to class — and not have had to wait till 6:30 at night to find out what was going on.

What we have to do is put this in a coherent form for them at the end of the day, and on the big events, give them the kind of context that they deserve. And, also, be responsive to the issues that are of interest to them — and put before them issues they may not have had time to think about but are going to have profound effects on their lives.

Are you trying to talk to them about subjects other than capital-gains taxes?

Yes. I think they are paying a lot more attention to news now, by the way, in part because of national-security issues. A lot of young people have friends or family in the military today. The other big issue is the so-called entitlements and how they're going to have to pay for them. There are other issues for them like housing — and how about the cost of education in America? How about what they're going to do about getting any kind of job stability? These are some of the ideas we'll be paying attention to.

Some TV critics are talking about your departure from *Nightly News* as if it's the removal of one of the figures from Mt. Rushmore. Do you view this as some giant generational shift?

Well, I *am* leaving next year. So it's left to another generation to figure this out. What I think is that every generation really develops its own set of sources for information based on the constant evolution of technology.

You know, when I was fifteen years old, and Chet Huntley and David Brinkley came on the air, it was a revelation. It was a fifteen-minute newscast. But there in South Dakota, we got this astonishing window on the world every night at 6:45. Now, if I lived in Yankton, I could dial up the BBC and Jim Lehrer and get the three networks and get Fox and MSNBC and CNN. I could go to the Internet and read *The New York Times*. Our obligation at the network is where do we fit into

that and how can we best capitalize on that to make sure that our piece of that remains important to those young people. There has been some research, by the way, that shows that, as people are coming up into their parenting ages, they gravitate back to the evening news.

That's good to hear — some of the trends in terms of sheer audience size are not encouraging. I grew up that way.

Yes, but you grew up without cell phones. You grew up without Gatorade. You grew up . . .

I grew up watching the broadcast evening news.

It's not that these kids don't have access to plenty of information about what's going on — they do.

Does that put more of a burden for context in your stories?

Yes, but that's been true for some time. We're not doing the wire service of the air. By the time people get to us, they know what's happened that day.

Let me ask you about Fox News.

Don't overstate Fox News — I mean, they're enormously successful, but it's still the most successful *niche*, is what it is.

The spectrum now has spread out so much. But the broadcast networks still have the biggest chunk of that spectrum. When you get into the cable niches, Fox has the biggest cable niche. But it's still much smaller than the least of the network niches.

What I think is that Fox has done a very smart job of carving out their place.

How would you describe that place?

Well, it's a lively, right-of-center opinionated all-news channel.

I think Fox would say that they had an attitude about the war that was, *We are going to war*.

It's the tabloid approach . . . You know, I'm not going to get into this — I don't have time to get into this — I worry about what NBC is doing.

So you're not going to get into a critique of Fox News.

No.

In terms of the coverage of the war in Iraq, NBC was rated the most balanced among the three broadcast networks and Fox by the Center for Media and Public Affairs, a media watch group that analyzed a month of prime-time coverage during the war. Is that a compliment? How do you think we're going to look back on this? I went back and looked at your interview with George W. Bush.

Well, it's really easy to look back and say I should've asked Bush about this. But what I was asking him about was what was going on at the time. The fact is, Bill Clinton thought there were weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. So did Hans Blix, because he told the U.N. Security Council that there were all these nerve agents that hadn't been accounted for yet. That interview reflected what we knew at the time. If I were to do that



interview again today, I'd have a different set of questions for him.

Well, I wasn't criticizing your interview. I just wonder how do we deal with this question of objectivity in journalism if we don't necessarily have all the facts?

Well, that's always been the case. We didn't have the full facts in Vietnam. That's the place of journalism — to keep turning over the rocks, keep pounding on the doors.

When the history of the coverage of the war in Iraq is written, do you think we're going to look back and say, *Maybe we should've had more independent reporting?*

Well, honestly, if you go back and look at it, it was pretty damn good. We reported as best as we knew about what was going on.

You mean in the walkup to the war?

Yes. And in the U.N. coverage — in which the French and the Germans had a full say on the American networks. We raised a lot of the questions that were being raised by a lot of people. But the fact is that Congress voted overwhelmingly to approve the war — and we had to reflect that. And no one knew for a fact what was going on on the ground — and the intelligence that we were able to learn on our own turned out not to be true, a lot of it. But we had no way of knowing that at the time.

The Bush Administration . . .

They play hardball.

How?

They play hardball like every administration does. They push their position very hard.

Do you agree that there's been a turn now in coverage of Iraq, and we're not getting the "other side" of the story — the positive side?

No, that's just not true. I went to Iraq in July, a hundred days into the war. And what I said then holds up — I said it's a checkerboard. You know, this square is a disaster, that square seems to be working pretty well; that one's pretty fragile. And that's what we've been reflecting. We've had stories on about the free press and about voting and about the Iraqi police being trained by outsiders. We've had stories about American families who've been in exile and went back there and were thrilled with what was going on.

What are you going to do when you step down from anchoring *NBC Nightly News*? Are you going to run for office?

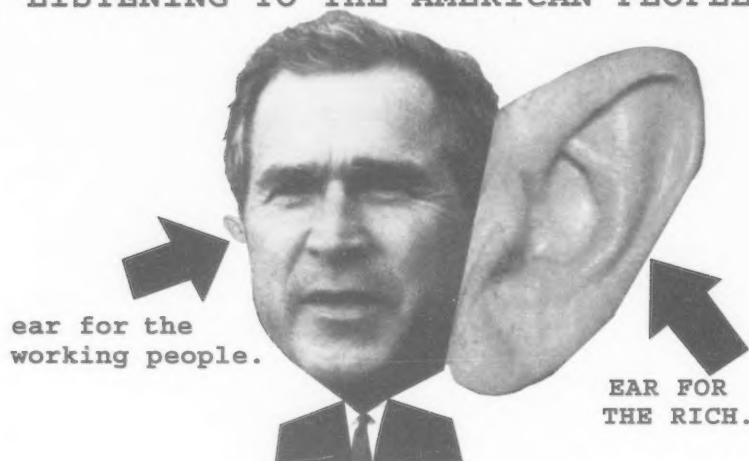
No. *God* no [laughs]. I'm not equipped to run for office. I'm honestly trying to decide. It will be some extension of what I've done most of my life. I'll do some television, I'll do probably some more writing. I'm a journalist. That's what I've always been. ■

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LITTLE MURDERS

Thirty years ago, editorial illustration in our mainstream media was provocative and smart, driving the words as often as following them. Today much of it is literal and safe, more decorative than idea-driven. How did this happen in an age where image is everything?

LISTENING TO THE AMERICAN PEOPLE



STEPHEN KRONINGER

BY JESSE SUNENBLICK

When Howell Raines quit *The New York Times*, Jerelle Kraus publicly called him Caligula, because he chopped off people's heads before they got to speak. Now she is telling me how Raines saw penises everywhere, in the most innocent, ridiculous places, making her job as op-ed art director difficult. "Nobody else would see it, but he would see it," she tells me, "and then I'd have to

change it." What she remembers is a pencil. A Janusz Kaspusta illustration of a round-erased pencil, signing a peace treaty, which she had to square off, in 1993, because of Caligula. "Get it?" she says. "A round-erased pencil?" I got it.

It was hard enough defending imagery that confronted religion or politics or race; to be on the lookout for accidental phalli was just another reminder of how far op-ed had fallen. Kraus knew better than anyone. No other art director had lasted more than roughly two years but she

lasted thirteen years all told, 1979 to 1989 and 1993 to 1996, each year, in her view, more watered down than the last.

She was an artists' advocate up until the day Raines dropped her from op-ed in 1996. But you don't understand, Kraus would sometimes say, ugly is beautiful. Once an illustrator was on the other side of a doorway and he heard her fight for his piece, and he said to her, My God, I have never heard someone defend my work like that. How could Kraus tell an editor in the '90s that in the '70s and '80s ugly had been permissible on op-ed? Or that back then, editors actually believed artists inspired them?

Kraus is now art director of the Weekend sections and the Arts & Ideas section, a job she was happy to take. And op-ed is some other thing. When she looks at it, she can't help thinking rather morosely that her career maps out the decline. "I was able to do my job for a long time," she says. "I wanted metaphors. I wanted ideas. If the image repeats the words why run the story? The page has completely deteriorated, in terms of drawing. Things change, the world changes, but I get so many calls from artists who complain about how bad the art is, bad draftsmanship, pieces that don't have any substance."

A number of top illustrators told me the same thing: *All the heavy thinkers are gone. All the big ideas diminished. Not just pencils but anything requiring the slightest abstraction of thought.* Not just at the *Times*, they said, but all over the place; it was endemic. Opinion art was reduced to display. Cheap irony prevailed. A generation of artists had internalized the new parameters of the offense-o-meter. As Christoph Niemann, a frequent *Times* contributor, put it: "When I work for the *Times* on a constant basis, I don't even suggest certain ideas any more. Of course, you want to get your image printed."

It was funny, in a sense, to hear censorship complaints from a field that had all but been pronounced dead in the first place. Illustration has supposedly been killed off three times over the years, by photography, by television, and most recently by the computer. Illustrators survive on ten-year-old pay rates. I fought the feeling that these artists were irrelevant. But there is

something timeless about pairing images with words, they told me, and they believe in it.

They also know that time to fight back is running out, which is why in 1999 they convened the first Illustration Conference. It was one thing to confront a new technology, like television; you could react to that, create alternative images. It was enough to worry about how huge caches of homogenous imagery were available to editors cheap over the Internet. But to worry about editors simply not getting it anymore, or being

afraid to get it, to worry about the distinct possibility that their own art was considered offensive to the masses, that was dangerous. Some kind of shift had taken place. And so every other year they get together now, and discuss how best to continue doing work that matters.

In 1999 hundreds of illustrators convened in Santa Fe. That year the talk was of staying competitive in a changing marketplace: of avoiding unfair labor contracts that transferred ownership of an image to a newspaper or magazine into perpetuity; of integrating digital techniques into workmanship; of diversifying into children's books or animation. By last summer, at the third Illustration Conference, in Philadelphia, there was an undercurrent of fear. In a panel moderated by Steven Guarnaccia, the *New York Times* op-

ed art director and a respected illustrator in his own right, some of the industry's more socially conscious editorial illustrators discussed the difficulties of getting artist-driven ideas published. It's one thing for artists to complain, but another thing entirely for an art director at our paper of record to share frustrations. Guarnaccia, choosing his words carefully, was one of the more vocal critics.

"As often as I can," he said, "I bring up artist-driven ideas. And unfortunately, they come in a trickle these days, partly because we've gotten a reputation for being timid for what we put on the page. Or I will push for a drawing that expresses a stronger idea than just the idea that's already in the piece. And the editors will love it, roll their eyes and say, 'We can never print that.'"



MARSHALL ARISMAN

Subject: death penalty Reason rejected: too violent



Bush ran without the beads of sweat

Most editorial illustrators work by commission, but in the fall of 2000, in the midst of a seemingly endless election quagmire in Florida, Ward Sutton got a jump on his competition. The author of the syndicated weekly *Sutton Impact* cartoon strip pitched an idea to the op-ed page at *The New York Times*, for a double portrait of the eventual winner, one face looking upward toward a rosy sky, the other looking down, morosely into shadowland, as if to say, yes, I am the victor, but was it really worth it?

The figures were fairly wooden save for two beads of sweat, expressing, said Sutton, "anxiety," on the forehead of the down-cast face. Bush won. The *Times* accepted the illustration. It ran December 14, above a column by Richard Brookhiser touting the doggedness that came from "having been a frat boy Republican in the alien environment of late 1960s Yale." It ran, however, without the beads of sweat.

Because the thought of people putting their heads together to decide what to do about sweat seemed simultaneously amusing and significant, I called then-op-ed editor Terry Tang and asked her about it. Most editors are not inclined to discuss such things but she obliged. "The piece was about the ease with which Bush would surprise people who underestimated him," she said. "It wasn't about Bush sweating bullets."

"It ran as an illustration," she continued. "As art that accompanies what is primary, the opinion piece" — a response that implied a kind of literalism that, again, seemed simultaneously amusing and significant.

In the early days of the *Times* op-ed page, it is hard to imagine two beads of sweat causing this much hand-wringing. Created in 1970, the page was the first of its kind, a symbiosis of word and image where neither was subservient, where artists were encouraged to portray the essence of a text as opposed to literal interpretations, where their ideas were as essential as a writer's ideas. The result was opinionated, provocative art, often dark and unsettling, from upstarts like Brad Holland, Roland Topor, and Eugene Mihaesco that today in its audacity seems staggering. For the first anniversary of the Attica prison uprising Brad Holland drew the body of a black man with one arm cut off at the elbow, and in the darkness of night, above the ground where he lay dead, the amputated forearm rose to a clenched fist, the severed fist of black power. Robert Pryor sketched Nixon with a nose that drooped down into the shape of Vietnam. Roland Topor depicted unemployed people as armless supplicants waiting patiently in line for new arms, which lay piled up on a desk. The images underscored the role of op-ed art as articulated by Harrison Salisbury, the first editor of the page. "Art is not employed on op-ed to 'illustrate,' to give the reader a picture of the scene the writer is trying to describe," Salisbury wrote in the introduction to *The Indignant Years*, a collection of art and articles from op-ed in the early '70s. "No. The task of op-ed's

In October I started asking artists for their rejects, the kind of material that they couldn't seem to sell any more, or that had been substantially altered for publication. The examples came in slowly, huge JPEG files that ate up my e-mail space, and anecdotes from artists calling out certain publications for messing with their art. *The Wall Street Journal* for telling an illustrator he could draw a dead lobster for a food column, but he couldn't put the same dead lobster in a tank of hot water. *Business Week* for lobbying to make a pirate figure in an illustration female, although in the history of pirating females are very hard to find. *Rolling Stone* for asking an artist to remove a Gap reference in a Bill and Monica send-up.

When it comes to rejection stories I have an innate distrust of artists, especially illustrators. It is a unique form of torture, having one's ideas adjusted to fit someone else's imperative, and it can't help but breed cynicism. Artists can miss the mark. There is also the matter of individual taste — not all rejected art points to malfeasance — and the neurotic vigilance inherent in all good editors.

That said, by the time I was done collecting I had a backpack full of JPEG printouts — sketches and finished pieces turned down or edited for being too dark or too demanding, too offensive, too political, too sexual — and cumulatively they seemed to suggest something, an encroachment, a shift toward timidity, or perhaps, although I was skeptical, a loss. (For how do you prove loss? It's next to impossible. Is garbage culture loss? Celebrity-driven photography? Are we worse off for these things?) Maybe these artists, in the big scheme of things, were ghosts. But their rejected images were clues: you could look at them and see evidence, of fantasy and metaphor being stripped away, of banality stuffed down your throat. Indifference and redundancy infect so much of our news now, produced as it is by corporate empires whose passion is profit. Here was a symptom of the demise — the rejected images, the ridiculousness of their fate in full display, and as a unit they cast a flicker of light on a dulled-out moonscape left behind by this plague of blandness.

Images should extend and deepen the words

images is to create an environment which extends and deepens the impact of the word; to provide an ambiance in which the writer may more intensively penetrate his reader's mind."

Over time, the word won out on the *Times* op-ed page, until today it is a rare instance when you need to read a piece to interpret the art conjoined with it. The art itself tends towards ha-ha irony while caricature and direct representation of ideas, as opposed to icon, are discouraged. Editors seem out of touch with the tradition of the page ("I can't give you the history of what art on the op-ed page was like when I wasn't there, obviously," Terry Tang told me). This is not to say that good art never appears, for it does; yet in general art is micro-managed by editors, and the governing logic behind it seems to follow the directive that Philip Taubman, formerly the deputy editorial page editor, gave to Peter Buchanan-Smith, the page's former art director, one day, as they spoke casually about the kind of attitude the page should convey: Most of our readers read the op-ed page over breakfast, Taubman had said. What appears on the page should be appetizing.

The last renaissance for illustration in America followed the birth of the op-ed page, when magazines like *Esquire*, *Evergreen*, and *New York*, that catered to the so-called New Journalism, often opted for the kind of surrealist-inspired illustration found

in the *Times*, rather than photography. Into the 1980s *Playboy*, *Rolling Stone*, and *The Atlantic Monthly* featured illustrated covers and used extensive in-text art. Weekend newspaper magazines at places like the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* and *The Boston Globe* won awards from *American Illustration*, an annual of the best of avant-garde art that made its debut in 1982. (Unlike the austere annuals of the Society of Illustrators, a venerable 103-year-old establishment based in New York, *American Illustration* featured a range of young conceptualists who learned from the tradition of the op-ed page.) Into the late 80s, *Time* magazine regularly hired four illustrators each week to compete to do the cover design, and often sent artists on site with writers to capture the essence of a place. Perhaps the most telling signal that illustration mattered could be found in the pages of magazines like *Seventeen*, or *Penthouse*, in which, if you browsed in 1982 you would find — amid the nakedness, the heavenly swoon — some interesting art: a Marshall Arisman illustration of the Reverend Jim Jones, the cult leader, his head and a handgun on a pillow; a Ralph Steadman caricature of Alexander Haig as some long-faced cat dripping blood from its paws; a terrifying Cristobal Toral oil painting of people wrapped like human cargo.

A few mainstays, like *The New Yorker*, remain loyal to illustration, but celebrity-driven photography and photomont-



STEVE BRODNER

'Brodner's characters are downright nasty'

tage now dominate the covers of magazines that were once illustration-friendly. The rise of the computer and digital imagery, through Adobe Photoshop, has pushed many basic tasks in-house. Stock houses — companies that provide vast caches of homogenous imagery on the cheap, typically over the Internet — offer an easier and cheaper and quicker alternative to inventive illustration. Every month, it seems, magazines are changing their designs to incorporate more photography.

At the Illustration Conference, Milton Glaser, creator of the 'I ♥ New York' logo, gave a keynote speech about the decline. Glaser likes to talk about the death of nuance in general, and over the fall we had a few conversations in which he pointed to television as an instrument that has taken away our ability to form abstract thoughts. Concurrently, he sees a kind of lowering of the individual voice. "The corporate voice has become increasingly wary of individual expression," he told me. "Increasingly, editors want to control the nature of that voice, and conform it to some agreed-upon methodology."

In his speech, Glaser repeated his television mantra and then turned to the differences between photography and illustration. "Photography has another intrinsic characteristic that illustration lacks," he said. "The innate sense of capturing a 'real' moment in time, proving that the subject actually existed." Glaser insinuated that, because of its believability, photography is the best tool for creating consumer desire. "In a culture that values commerce above all other things," he continued, "the imaginative potential of illustration has become irrelevant . . . Illustration is now too idiosyncratic." One might go a step further. Idiosyncrasy takes time to unravel. It takes an act of interpretation. There is danger implicit in interpretation. It gives the audience time to think, time to get upset, and, perhaps, to get offended.

The invective caricaturist Steve Brodner compares this period to the early Reagan years, when it was difficult to criticize the president in the press. And then, overnight, came Iran-Contra, and Brodner's career was born. In the wake of the CBS miniseries fiasco in early November, Brodner pitched a fairly harsh, six-paneled "Stranger Than CBS" spoof to the *Times* featuring "Great Reagan Movie Scenes You Couldn't Make Up." The *Times* rejected it. It would have fit nicely sandwiched in between op-ed pieces by Edmund Morris and Max Frankel that ran on November 9. What ran that day was a bland, silhouetted drawing of an everyman watch-

ing Reagan on TV and extrapolating the president into his living room. The idea was literal — seeing is always believing, as the Frankel piece said — but the art failed to invite much thought. And the Reagan portrait didn't look like Reagan. Brodner's art, it seems, had fallen out of favor with *Times* editors since the late '90s. "Brodner's characters are downright nasty and that's why they didn't like them," says Nicolas Blechman, op-ed art director from 1999 to 2000. "I got a verbal list from editors. On one side were people who they couldn't have on the page because of the way they did their portraits, like Brodner and Ralph Steadman. On the other side was Robert Grossman. They loved Robert Grossman's characters because they were cartoony. They had this nice, fluffy quality to them; his figures looked rubbery, even affable. The drawings didn't look mean-spirited. It was a more jovial way of making fun of a politician."

Lyndon Johnson wasn't jovial — he looked as if he read other people's dark thoughts and liked them — but Robert Grossman drew him that way, in a May 2002 op-ed piece originally assigned to Brad Holland. The accompanying article, written by Tom Wicker, used the publication of Robert Caro's biography of Johnson, *Master of the Senate*, as the occasion for a brief character study of a president divided between ambition and compassion. The narrative leads us to a longish, capping scene in which the author re-

counts his early, reportorial days on Capitol Hill when, as a *Times* White House correspondent, he landed an interview with Johnson, soon after Kennedy was murdered. Wicker rushed to the White House and was shown into the Oval Office. LBJ was having his hair cut. Wicker was reduced to nothingness before the man; he just stood there blinking and Johnson seemed to enjoy his unease until, after what seemed like hours, Wicker finally commented on how the nation was lucky to have such a man take over, and Johnson stood up and spoke.

This sort of intimidation tactic was known as the Johnson Treatment. The title of the article ("Remembering the Johnson Treatment") emphasizes it, as does the single pull-quote ("How the master of the Senate made use of his haircut"). When Holland got the assignment — it was an overnight job — he came up with a quick sketch of LBJ sitting in a barber chair, draped in a sheet, looking at himself vainly in a hand-held mirror, with, as if it were a completely normal thing, a Capitol dome atop his head, encircling it just above the eyes, like a bowl for a Texas farm boy haircut, or a crown. "The



BRAD HOLLAND

'The dome seemed like a leap of the imagination that made sense'

There's danger in interpretation

whole book was about how Lyndon Johnson was the most effective majority leader of the Senate ever," Holland told me. "It seemed like a leap of the imagination that just made sense."

Holland faxed the sketch to Steven Guarnaccia, and it was approved. He went to Borders to buy the Caro book to get an informative photograph. Around midnight, he received a call from Guarnaccia, who said his editor didn't understand why the Capitol dome was on LBJ's head, and that Holland would have to remove the dome or the *Times* wouldn't use the image. In a way, it was an understandable reaction; the illustration requires an imaginative leap. What does the artist mean by the Capitol dome? There is something disarming about its posture. Maybe it struck a raw nerve. Maybe it was just too difficult. In any case Holland refused to cut the dome, the image was rejected, and the *Times* went to Robert Grossman.

If one artist could be said to embody the taste of today's editorial illustration industry, it is Robert Grossman. He is a tongue-in-cheek ironist, a cartoonist, and a smart one; his images hit upon our neuroses yet even the most vituperative of them seem tame and acceptable. Take, for example, his post-9/11 *Rolling Stone* drawing of the reconstructed twin towers, two pillars that form the legs of a giant robotic American male who towers above the city, flipping the world the bird with both hands. "I think it's better to have fun," Grossman says wryly. "And I guess if that means I'm a relatively polite person, so be it."

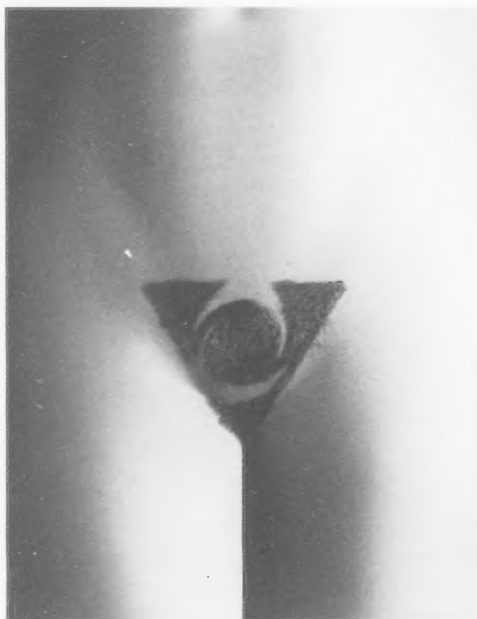
The LBJ image Grossman did for the *Times* drew its inspiration from the briefest, most literal of anecdotes: a four-sentence description of Johnson being pulled over for speeding in his native Texas. As the story goes, the cop gasped, "My God," at seeing Johnson, and Johnson replied, "And don't you forget it!" The drawing shows him speeding off in a Cadillac, a snarky grin on his affable, cartoony face. It is not a bad drawing. It requires nothing of the reader.

Who else could get away with twin tower birds? Certainly not Bill Russell, who was suspended without pay for fifteen days (it was later reduced to one day) by *The San Francisco Chronicle*, where he is a staff artist, for an image he drew for the cover of its book review section last April. To illustrate a review of a book about Napa and Sonoma Valley farmers and other natives who resent the intrusion of rich outsiders who

impose cosmopolitan culture on the countryside, Russell sketched a farmer on his tractor in a field, a convertible swerving by at high speed. The farmer is gesturing in a way that, if you pull the newspaper close enough to your eyeballs, appears to be (even upon close inspection one can't be sure) reminiscent of what Grossman made perfectly explicit — the bird, though so tiny it is hard to see.

No editor caught it. The image made it all the way to the printer. A pressman from the paper noticed it and called the newsroom, but it was too late to pull the illustration. The *Chronicle* published the diminutive bird but ran a page-two editors' note apologizing in advance for an "objectionable illustration." Meetings were held to get to the bottom of this. Meanwhile, although *Chronicle* editors wouldn't let CJR reprint the image, and although Russell declined to talk about it, the fallout had a ring of absurdity to it, as the illustration generated virtually no complaints.

"Bill read the book," says Kathleen Rhodes, a *Chronicle* librarian and unit chair of the Northern California Media Worker's Guild. "He was trying to look at the 'them and us' kind of thing. It was perfect. I think that on some level they were really afraid of offending anyone, and they were really surprised that they didn't get any responses."



The strange case of the collagist Stephen Kroninger underscores this kind of hypersensitivity. Kroninger, who had a solo show at the MoMA in 1992, was asked to do biweekly illustrations for the New York *Daily News's* Ideas & Opinion page, beginning in the summer of 2001, an assignment that lasted only four months before he pulled out. It was an odd pairing in the first place, given Kroninger's famously acerbic political work. The second piece he did for the *Daily News* was inspired by a Labor Day speech by George Bush. "The slogan was about listening to the people," Kroninger told me. "He was somewhere in the Midwest talking about listening to the heartland, and it was like, yeah, sure, we know who you listen to."

His collage that week was a portrait of Bush with one big ear, for the rich, and one little ear, for the working people, and he lifted the speech's slogan as ironic text: "Listening to the American people." Kroninger sent it in and heard nothing. On Sun-

The image that ran instead was a cartoon penis

MIRKO ILLIC

Editors cut that text, the only clue to the picture's meaning

day he opened the paper to find someone else's art in its stead. He wasn't surprised. He'd been paid. He shrugged it off.

The next incident came after 9/11, when the Environmental Protection Agency publicly stated that the air quality in downtown Manhattan was fine, when people knew it wasn't fine. (It was later reported that the White House may have pressured the EPA into making such statements.) Kroninger has a friend, the artist Art Spiegelman, whose daughter attends Stuyvesant High School, five blocks from the ruins of the World Trade Center, where classes resumed, some said, too quickly, and where parents were already nervous. "He kept telling me stories about how everybody was saying there was nothing wrong with the air, about how he was trying to get a response from the city, the state, wherever, to say what he already knew, that the air *wasn't* fine. Maybe it was okay, but it wasn't fine. He told me I should do a piece about it, and I did."

It was an evolution-of-man motif, on a high school chalkboard, with modern man in gas mask and moonsuit and a teacher in the foreground (also wearing a gas mask), giving a science lecture to her students. Atop the collage was accompanying text about potentially "unacceptable" air inside Stuyvesant High School, pulled word-for-word from a *Daily News* article that had run on November 7. Editors cut that text, the only clue to the picture's meaning. What remained was a bizarre, indecipherable image that had lost its essence. Was the *Daily News* concerned about a too-specific reference in the art? Did the quote somehow become dangerous when affixed to art?

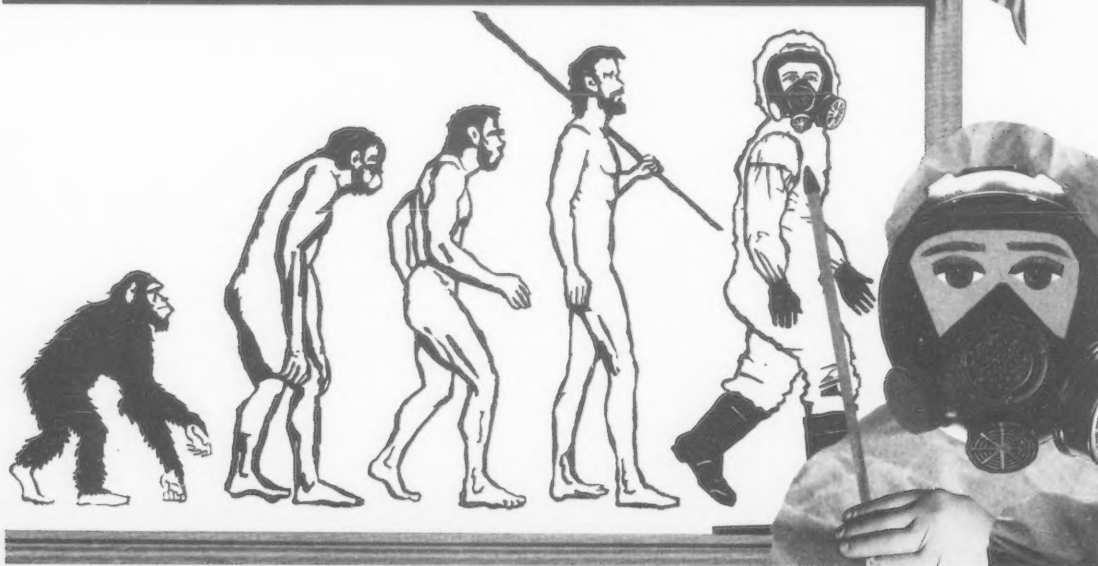
The suggestion that there are things people are willing to read, or look at in photographs and movies, that become circumspect in art was a common refrain as I was reporting this story. The classic example dates back to a 1983 drawing Marshall Arisman did for *Time*. Asked to illustrate a cover story on the death penalty, Arisman produced an image of a man strapped in the electric chair with a skull projecting sideways from his head. The image was cut. In its place ran a black page with "Death Penalty" in huge, white block lettering. Below those words were smaller words, a paragraph descending down and eventually cut off, that expressed the same jolting idea as Arisman's illustration: "The chair is bolted to the floor near the back of a 12-ft. by 18-ft. room. You sit on a seat of cracked rubber secured by rows of copper tacks. Your ankles are strapped into half-moon-shaped foot cuffs lined with canvas. A 2-in.-wide greasy leather belt with 28 buckle holes and worn grooves where it has been pulled very tight many times is secured around your waist just above . . ."

When I spoke with Arisman he volunteered the image immediately. Something an editor at *Time* had said stuck with him over the years: We're a society that's willing to read all sorts of things about violence, to look at photos about violence. But we're not willing to look at artwork about violence.

Arisman says he asked why that was so. The editor replied that when people look at photos, they think they're looking at

CONTINUED ON PAGE 28

NEWS ITEM: "Environmental tests found 'unacceptable' levels of dust inside Stuyvesant High School from the World Trade Center excavation that could pose a danger to students and staff."



STEPHEN KRONINGER

What Are We Afraid Of?

When Mark Fiore landed a job as a staff political cartoonist at the *San Jose Mercury News* in 2001, he thought he had it made: a steady gig in an industry where salaried positions are notoriously hard to come by. But after six months of butting heads with the editorial board, Fiore fled to the Web and the freedom of independent publication. "There was turmoil at the paper," Fiore says. "Our publisher had just resigned, and the editorial page was under pressure to not appear so liberal. I had a lot of fingers in my cartoon."

Fiore's online animated strip (www.markfiore.com) has since been picked up by *SF-Gate.com* (the online arm of the *San Francisco Chronicle*), *The Village Voice*, and *Salon.com*, among others, effectively giving the middle finger to all those fingers in his print cartoon. Fiore's strip skewers everyone from the president to the pope, and has a particular knack for lampooning the Bush administration's war on terror. For his efforts, Fiore was awarded the Online Journalism Award for commentary in 2002.

Fiore's success is emblematic of a deeper phenomenon. As the mainstream press retreats from editorial illustration in general, and specifically from art that could be deemed offensive or biased, artists are turning to the Web and other forms of self-publishing. "The increasing success of alternative mediums," says Peter Kuper, co-founder of *World War 3 Illustrated*, an underground magazine that for twenty-four years has published artists whose work doesn't fit in the mainstream, "is a byproduct of people feeling that there is information out there that they're just not getting." The cartoonist Art Spiegelman, who famously resigned in protest from *The New Yorker* earlier this year, citing the "widespread conformism of the mass media in the Bush era," has found *WW3* to be one of only two U.S. venues that will publish his new strip (the other is *The Forward*; see page 33.)

Much of the fuel for this artistic diaspora comes from the turmoil of America's course — domestic and foreign — since September 11, 2001. The Internet is the great facilitator, but not the only one. Joe Sacco's "cartoon journalism" books from Bosnia and the Palestinian territories have garnered critical acclaim. Robbie Conal, a self-described "guerrilla poster artist," spreads his message of "counter-infotainment" by plastering his illustrations in public spaces. And a host of alt-weeklies and

second-tier mags still publish art and comics too bold for prime time.

Art and politics have always been intertwined, and the drive to be seen and heard above the din of a complacent mass media is nothing new. In 1917 *The Masses* magazine was held in violation of sedition laws for its provocative literary and artistic criticism of

the U.S. entry into World War I. But where a censorious government harassed *The Masses* by manipulating its postal rates, today the Internet allows artists to connect directly with an audience.

Witness David Rees's online comic strip *Get Your War On* (www.mnftiu.cc). Spontaneously created two days into the war in Afghanistan, response to Rees's strip has been unprecedented. First spread via word-of-mouth and then through Weblog wildfire, the site received an estimated one million unique visitors in its first year alone, success that Rees has parlayed into a contract with *Rolling Stone*.

Rees, an Oberlin-educated cartoon hobbyist and itinerant magazine fact-checker, offers his often-profanic insights on the post-9/11 world through the eyes of his clip-art office workers:

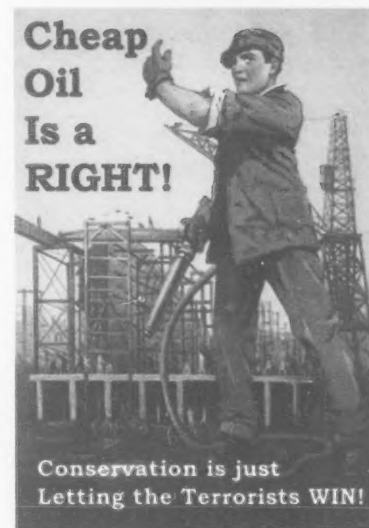
Generic office worker #1: Oh my God, this War on Terror is going to rule! I can't wait until this war is over and there's no more terrorism!

Generic office Worker #2: I know! Remember when the U.S. had a drug problem, and then we declared War on Drugs, and now you can't buy drugs anymore? It'll be just like that!

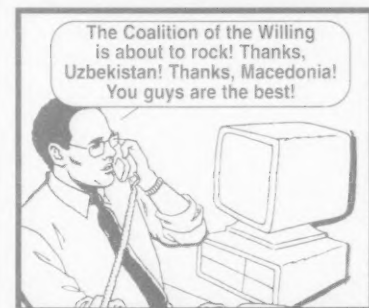
Another poster artist, Micah Wright, a former Army Ranger turned antiwar comic book artist, retouches American propaganda art from World Wars I and II to produce his own brand of matter-of-fact satire. An original recruiting poster depicting a dashing GI in mid-grenade toss, for example, is now wondering, "What the fuck am I doing here? I only joined up for the college money!" It is through the inevitable double-take that Wright wants people to have to think about what he is saying.

Mirko Ilic, a former art director for *The New York Times* op-ed pages whose illustration graces the cover of the latest issue of *World War 3 Illustrated*, likens the formula for getting published in mainstream outlets to paint-by-numbers, and laments what he sees as the worst part of mainstream media's timidity: "influence on the flow of free thought and ultimately self-censorship. The most sophisticated system of oppression is when you don't feel oppressed at all." — Christopher Lesser

Lesser is an intern at *CJR*.



MICAH WRIGHT/SEVENTHSTORIES PRESS



From the top: Fiore's Flash animation; Wright's tongue in cheek take on the power of patriotism; one of Rees's generic office pundits at work



CATHIE BLECK

'Human faces make them nervous'

reality, not a statement by the artist. But when people look at artwork, they think the artist invented it.

Again and again it was like this: the image that took the place of the original was so obviously weaker that no rationalization saved it. When I saw them side by side it often seemed comical, no more so than in the case of Mirko Ilic. Maybe it was that in his rough, Bosnian burr he caught the absurdity so well. "You can always sneak things in at the *Times*," he was fond of saying, "but that's not the point. I don't want to sneak anything in."

He fired away. "I was working in Yugoslavia, in the time of Communism. Never did I have to show a draft. I come to America, art directors start asking for drafts. I say first, What do you mean 'drafts'? And second, What do you mean 'art director'? Most art directors are females. I call them 'art secretaries' because editors are making the decisions. Move left. Move right. They've become messengers."

In 2000, Ilic was asked to illustrate a cover story for *The Village Voice* looking at how AOL could profit mightily from the porn industry if it chose to, entitled "You've Got Porn." He envisioned the Y in 'You've got mail' and an upside-down AOL logo as formed by neatly trimmed pubic hair in a female crotch. The image is stunningly realistic, poignant even, and might have been published had Ilic not turned it in on a Friday — he left town for the weekend — rather than his Monday due date. There are divergent accounts of what happened next. Ilic claims that women editors saw the illustration over the weekend and complained that it exploited the female anatomy. The *Voice's* p.r. office claims that editor-in-chief Don Forst took it off the cover because it looked "too fleshy." The image wasn't altogether rejected — it appeared as a full-page illustration in-text — but in the world of illustration this is the equivalent of a body blow. The back pages of the *Voice* are full of too-fleshy pictures, advertisements for sexual services, that allow it to be the largest free paper in America. So

Ilic called the art director for an explanation. "I said, you're the largest because of the pimps and whores, the 900 numbers and whatnot which is a *direct* exploitation of women. And it's okay for you to publish that but not this? It's a double standard."

The image that ran instead was a cartoon penis popping out of a jack-in-the-box, one side of which doubled as a computer monitor flashing the ubiquitous AOL triangle. It had some of the ingredients of Ilic's illustration. But they'd been reconfigured as gimmicks. I got the point — it was impossible not to get the point. But when I put the two images side by side it was hard not to feel cheated.

It was weird: I didn't solicit stories about *The New York Times* but everyone I spoke with had one. Even Robert Grossman, who told me his own Howell Raines tale (involving a too-big nose, a former president, and a late-night emergency Photoshop session). Illustrators didn't exempt *The Washington Post* or the *Los Angeles Times* or anywhere else, but the *Times* stung the deepest, because of how influential its op-ed art had once been. One day in early November, with images still flooding in, I went there, to Forty-third Street, to visit the op-ed editor David Shipley. I negotiated the maze of the tenth-floor editorial offices and I found Shipley's room.

I had brought an image rejected by the *Times*. It was modest, a small picture set beside five letters to the editor about the grim prospects for peace between Israelis and Palestinians. But its circumstances seemed to sum things up. The artist, Cathie Bleck, had been commissioned to create something unspecific, something that would, in a general sense, depict the idea that peace in the Middle East had failed. She had a day to do it. She came up with a Humpty Dumpty motif. It was okayed by Steven Guarnaccia, but rejected by an editor. The image was not all that fresh — Bleck admits it — but what took its place was even less so: a broken peace sign, which was a wheel supporting a wheelbarrow, inside of which were the Star of David and a crescent moon. One obvious icon replaced another.

But we never got to discuss specific images anyway. We got sidetracked, somehow, me telling Shipley about this project, and him interrupting me at times to disapprove. "I have to say, that's tremendously naïve," he said. "If you're comparing an illustration in *Glamour* or *Rolling Stone* with one on the op-ed page or in *The New Republic*."

Shipley never smiled or frowned. Later I learned he'd written speeches for President Clinton. "I think it would be useful," he continued, "to make distinctions." His point is that doing illustration for a daily newspaper — with its tight deadlines and need to respond to breaking news — is often different from illustration done for monthly magazines. He told me about his passion for photography, how he was try-

Banality stuffed down your throat



ing to visually surprise readers by adding things like puzzle pages, stand alone art, and charts and graphs. Then he moved on to caricature. "What's wrong with hinting at something rather than beating our readers over the head with a sledgehammer, resorting to the obvious?" We

talked some more like that, and I believed him. He was opening up the page, and some illustrators I spoke with said he was easier to work with than his predecessor.

But in expanding the experience of the page, as he put it, it seemed to me that something had been lost. And when he then suggested that op-ed was still home to great art, I couldn't help but feel we were talking across some unbridgeable divide. Everything was fine to him. "Op-ed is one of the last places for black-and-white illustration," Shipley said. "It's something we cherish. I want people to think about illustration the same way they think about the articles. They don't have to get it in the first read."

Yes, that's what illustrators wanted, too. But that kind of nuance is rare today.

In the Cathie Bleck illustration, Humpty Dumpty bounces broken-shelled against the ground while a dove of peace watches shamefully, atop a nearby wall. It is succinct, not mysterious. The only human characteristic is a generic, downturned mouth and beady, disgruntled eyes. "It's an image that's been used before, sure," Bleck told me. "When you're in such a tight timeframe, and you don't hit the nail on the head a couple times, it's easy to go back to an image people are comfortable with. Because they wanted something that would convey an array of feelings on the Middle East."

But she *had* turned in two other images, one of which might have been at least something to ponder: a surrealist image of an open doorway leading to a barren room with a Turkish façade and cracked walls, indicating, in her words, destruction and in-

trospection. After all I had heard, it seems obvious why this tack didn't work. But why not Humpty Dumpty?

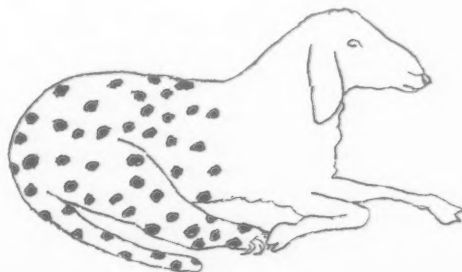
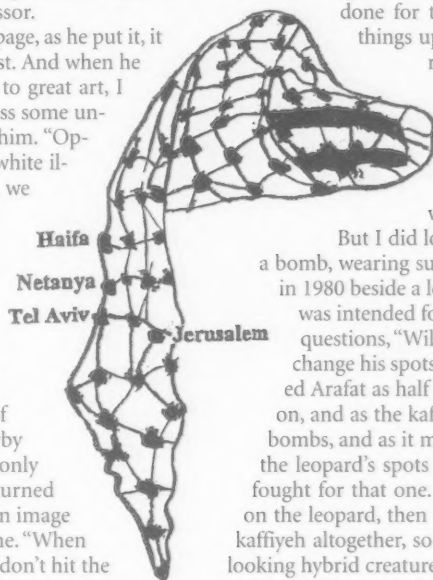
I looked and looked at it. Guarnaccia had e-mailed Bleck saying, "Thanks for the wonderful job," and hours later it had been rejected. Hidden somewhere was a fatal flaw, but what? I remembered something Robert Grossman had told me, regarding faces. They almost never use an identifiable face, he had said. "Human faces make them nervous, so they often use something that's symbolic — hammers and sickles and stars."

And so Mark Podwal came to mind. Among other things, he does Arafats, and nobody could ever accuse the man of being impartial. He'd shown me three Arafats he had done for the *Times* that also seemed to sum things up, but differently. In a way, it was irrelevant to look; if they didn't let Humpty Dumpty through there was no way Arafat would get through. And if you couldn't draw Arafat, and you couldn't humanize Humpty Dumpty, what was left in the middle?

But I did look. The first image was of Arafat as a bomb, wearing sunglasses and his kaffiyeh, which ran in 1980 beside a letter to the editor. The second image was intended for a 1996 op-ed article that asked the questions, "Will the PLO stop terrorism? Can Arafat change his spots?" The original he submitted depicted Arafat as half lamb, half leopard, with his kaffiyeh on, and as the kaffiyeh draped down its spots became bombs, and as it merged with the leopard you saw that the leopard's spots were also bombs. Jerelle Kraus had fought for that one. First an editor removed the bombs on the leopard, then the bombs on the kaffiyeh, then the kaffiyeh altogether, so all that remained was a ridiculous-looking hybrid creature.

You might say he did the third one intentionally bland. Because he knew how times had changed. This was last year. He didn't even bother drawing Arafat. He simply drew the kaffiyeh, and as it flowed down it became a map of Palestine. But you know the story with that one. Because you never saw it. ■

Jesse Sunenblick is a recent graduate of New York University Department of Journalism's Portfolio Program.



'Can Arafat change his spots?'

DANGEROUS SCIENCE

Why a Mob Attacked the Most Rational Man in the Middle East

BY ERIC UMANSKY

Khalil Shikaki is very excited. A pollster working in the de facto Palestinian capital of Ramallah in the West Bank's rolling hills, Shikaki is happily poring over census tract maps, explaining the intricacies of his polling data and how he collects it. "We take a tract," he says, speaking in an office that is pleasant, professional, and antiseptic — glass doors, gray carpet, Dells — "split it up further. Randomize..."

This goes on for a good while — Shikaki is also a professor, comfortable, it seems, with lecturing. Then, perhaps sensing what I really want, he points to his window. "That's where the mob came in from," he says. "They broke the window, climbed in, and started smashing the office equipment. I barricaded myself in my office and some in the crowd started pushing me around, though others held them back."

The mob had come to Shikaki's office because of a poll about Palestinians' right of return — the U.N.-recognized notion that Palestinians will eventually be allowed to return to the homes that their families left after the birth of Israel in 1948, and again after the 1967 Arab-Israeli war — even if those homes don't exist anymore and are within Israel's pre-1967 borders. The right of return is cherished by Palestinians. Ask nearly any Palestinian where he is from, and even if his family has lived in Jordan or Lebanon since 1948, he will tell you that he is "from" whatever village his ancestors lived in until they fled or were forced out. The Israeli government, meanwhile, disputes that such a right exists and has opposed allowing large numbers of Palestinians to return, largely because allowing them to do so could result in the majori-



KHALIL SHIKAKI

ty of Israel's population being Palestinian.

A compromise over the right of return, long considered one of the Mideast's most intractable issues, had been suggested during the waning days of peace negotiations in January 2001. The proposal, pushed by Israel, would have symbolically recognized the right of return and offered Palestinians two basic options: 1) a limited though unspecified number could return to Israel if they adopted Israeli citizenship; 2) others could forgo returning in exchange for "fair" financial compensation.

Curious about what Palestinians would do if presented with such an offer, Shikaki polled about 4,500 Palestinians in the

West Bank, Gaza, Lebanon, and Jordan. The poll was completed in June 2003 and contained surprising, even shocking, results: most Palestinians said they would accept such an agreement if offered and the vast majority, 72 percent, said they would rather receive compensation than return to Israel and become Israeli citizens.

But for many Palestinian political factions, especially for Yasir Arafat's Fatah faction, which draws much of its support from refugees and has used the right of return as a major bargaining chip with the Israelis, this was heresy. Arafat in particular has always seemed to promise refugees that one day they'll be able to return to their original homes. "To Jerusalem we march, martyrs by the millions," he told supporters in a typical TV interview last year. And in early December, Palestinians in Gaza City protested the so-called Geneva Accord — a symbolic Middle East peace plan crafted by a group of self-appointed Israeli and Palestinian negotiators — in part because it all but rules out the

right of return.

So Shikaki's poll was more than just controversial. It was also a kind of test, just as Shikaki himself — an independent and dispassionate scientist in a land of fierce political passion — has been a test for Palestinian society, which has long been considered one of the freest in the Arab world but which has been rocked by upheaval over the past three years. How would Palestinians, in particular politicians and power brokers, react to something so contentious? Would they try to shoot the messenger?

Shikaki planned to announce the results on July 13 in a press conference inside his office. But as he was getting started the mob showed up. It didn't seem to be a spontaneous gathering. They ar-

rived in an orderly manner by bus and offered the gathered journalists their own press release. Calling themselves the Committee for the Defense of Palestinian Refugees' Rights, and using stationery of the PLO refugee affairs department (the head of that PLO office criticized the poll and the violence, but also disavowed the attacks), they accused Shikaki of "selling himself to the U.S. dollar" and "deviating from the consensus of the Palestinian people." The statement warned "anyone who considers harming the national rights that their fate will be similar to that of Shikaki."

As Palestinian police officers stood by, the mob trashed Shikaki's office and then made its way down the street to Arafat's compound where, according to *The New York Times*, Arafat welcomed them — though the *Times* noted it was unclear whether Arafat knew what the mob had just done. "It's possible Arafat wasn't unhappy with the mob," says Shikaki, carefully.

The seemingly organized mob exemplifies a murky new foe that independent-minded Palestinian journalists and intellectuals face. With the Palestinians' de facto government, the Palestinian Authority, nearly destroyed after three years of violence, the territories and Gaza are witnessing what Hanan Ashwari, a Palestinian legislator and intellectual, calls a "regression to tribalism."

While order still prevails in large parts of the territories, thugs, gangsters, and masked gunmen — sometimes current or former members of Palestinian security forces — are an increasing presence across the West Bank and Gaza. "There's a rise of lawlessness. It's a real problem," says Miranda Sissons, a researcher at Human Rights Watch.

They most often target suspected collaborators or anybody who gets in the way of their criminal dealings (car theft is a big problem in the territories). But increasingly the targets are independent Palestinian journalists and academics, like Shikaki — just the sort of people the Palestinians need to build their society. According to officials from the Palestinian Independent Commission for Citizens' Rights (PICCR), a quasi-official government watchdog group, by fall there had been at least fifty "violations of freedom of expression" in 2003 — attacks or threats against journalists and academics. "It's higher than in 2002, which in turn was higher than 2001," says Husein Sholi, who

leads PICCR's legal unit. "People are taking the law into their own hands."

The list of incidents is long: in September 2002 the house of the former information minister was fired at after he criticized Arafat. In late November 2003, gunmen fired at the Ramallah home of the lead Palestinian negotiator for the Geneva Accord. He was in Geneva at the time. And in the most prominent case next to Shikaki's, the Ramallah offices of the Arab satellite channel al-Arabiya were raided in September 2003.

Satellite dishes are common features on Palestinians' roofs. They allow people to bypass the local, self-censoring TV stations in favor of the more independent stations like al-Jazeera and al-Arabiya. Hence the attack on al-Arabiya, two months before the mob showed up at Shikaki's office. "Five masked gunmen with M-16s entered the office," recalls Nabil Khatib, who manages the bureau, "and the guys started shouting and smashing the furniture and equipment. They locked employees in the video editing room, and said, 'It's a message.' We said, 'From whom?' and they said, 'You should understand. And it's your last one.'"

Khatib says that as a result of this incident he's working with other journalists to start a group they're tentatively



'He dared to touch on a very sensitive issue and he paid the price'

calling the Palestinian Committee to Protect Journalists.

At fifty, Shikaki, who wears a scraggly beard, has all the professional accoutrements of an A-list pollster: he publishes op-eds in *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and *The Wall Street Journal*; he has been a fellow at the Brookings Institution. And he regularly works with Israeli pollsters, who gush about him. "Shikaki is the best in the territories," says Mina Tzemach, a pollster for the Dahaf Institute, a leading Israeli polling firm, who

frequently does polls for *Yediot Ahronot*, Israel's largest paper. "He's meticulous. He's careful about phrasing questions. And he's a real man of peace."

Shikaki didn't seem a likely candidate for a career of such accomplishment and moderation. His family was forced from its home village in Israel in 1948, and a few years later Shikaki was born in the Gaza Strip, one of the world's most densely populated places. Bereft of economic opportunities, it is a breeding ground for militants. And though Shikaki's father was a man of modest means — he worked in construction — nearly all of his sons became professionals.

Not all of them stayed out of trouble, though. Shikaki's brother Fathi, a doctor, was a founder of Islamic Jihad. He was killed in Malta in 1995, reportedly by Israeli undercover agents. Shikaki, meanwhile, has renounced violence, a rare stance among Palestinians. (Palestinian support for attacks on settlers and soldiers is nearly unanimous, and one of Shikaki's polls found 75 percent support for the October suicide bombing of a restaurant in Haifa.)

Shikaki isn't interested in philosophizing or trying to psychoanalyze why he and his brother took such different paths. "This is typical of most Palestinian families," he says. "Some are nationalists, others are Islamists, and some are neither here nor there."

Shikaki went to college in the West Bank and Beirut, and earned his Ph.D. in political science at Columbia University in 1985. In 1986 he returned to the West Bank to teach at an-Najah University.

It's one thing to do polling

work in, say, the U.S., and another to do it the Palestinian territories — where Shikaki has faced repression since the beginning of his career. In 1986, Shikaki says, he tried to do a poll with a colleague about rising support for Islamists at universities. "The Israelis wouldn't allow it," he says. "They threatened to deport us. My colleague went ahead and did the survey and he was eventually expelled for three years."

The situation began to improve in 1992, he says, with the election of Israel's first left-leaning government since 1977, and Israeli restrictions on Shikaki's work

essentially disappeared in 1993 with the signing of the Oslo peace accords.

Their disappearance spawned great hope for Palestinian journalists and intellectuals. But the Palestinian Authority, which began taking over responsibility for some towns in 1994, did not have many ACLU types in its ranks. In one of its first official acts, the Palestinian Authority closed down a daily paper after Yasir Arafat was offended by a story. At the time, an adviser to Arafat explained, "There are no restrictions on the Palestinian press, with one exception: that it should not be against the interests of the Palestinian people."

"During those early years of the PA, reporters were the third most repressed segment of Palestinian society — behind Islamic radicals and collaborators," says Nabil Khatib. "Dozens of journalists were arrested." Khatib himself was arrested in 1996. "They released me after twelve hours, saying there had been a misunderstanding," he says.

Many Palestinians talk proudly about their democratic tendencies. "Palestinian society is more democratic than any other Arab society," says Khaled Abu Toameh, a Palestinian journalist who works for NBC News and others. "Frankly, I think we have been influenced by the Israeli democratic experience." But most Palestinians also acknowledge that especially during the height of Palestinian Authority power in the 1990s, journalists and academics in the territories were not willing to take many risks and learned to deal with the Authority by censoring themselves. Such self-censorship was, and still is, bolstered by the fact that much of the Palestinian media — including two of the three major Palestinian newspapers — is owned by people connected to the Palestinian Authority.

In 1993, with funding from European NGOs — and seed money from the PLO — Shikaki started his own polling organization in Nablus, the Center for Palestine Research and Studies. His prominence grew, and by the mid-1990s he was quoted regularly in Western papers. He developed a reputation as one of the few Palestinian intellectuals or journalists willing to push the envelope of dissent. "I had done a poll saying that Sheik Yassin [founder of Hamas] was a more popular figure than Yasir Arafat," he recalls. "Soon I got a copy of the poll back, with a note from Arafat on top, 'It's dangerous to play with numbers.' I just ignored it." In 1999, Shikaki's research operation took heat for a report on

corruption within the Palestinian Authority. "Arafat was angry, and I felt the board wasn't giving me political backing," Shikaki says. In response, Shikaki replaced his organization's board of directors, changed its name to the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, and relocated to Ramallah.

Abu Toameh calls Shikaki a "unique phenomenon. He's independent. But he also dared to touch on a very sensitive issue and he paid the price."

Things began to change slowly with the beginning of the Intifada in September 2000. Shikaki and other analysts say the violence, led by young Palestinians (often affiliated with Hamas and the al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades), was partially directed at the Palestinian Authority out of disgust with the Authority's corruption and repression. "The young guard has turned to violence to get Israel to withdraw from the West Bank and the Gaza Strip unilaterally and simultaneously to weaken the Palestinian old guard and eventually displace it," wrote Shikaki in a widely read *Foreign Affairs* article.

With young Palestinians increasingly contemptuous of the Authority's power, and Israel launching isolated retaliatory strikes against Authority police stations and guard posts, the Authority's power continued its decline. Then came March 2002, when it was all but destroyed. January and February of that year had seen a torrent of Palestinian suicide bombings — roughly one a week. In late March, Israel launched what it called Operation Defensive Shield, and for the first time since the Oslo accords were signed Israeli soldiers reoccupied most cities in the West Bank. Israeli troops dismantled Palestinian security forces, demolished the services' headquarters, destroyed Palestinian jails, and refused to allow Palestinian police and security service officers to surrender in uniform. (The Gaza Strip wasn't occupied and Palestinian forces there were left relatively intact.)

It shocked Palestinians and caused many to openly question the Palestinian Authority, which hadn't been able to slow the reoccupation or to efficiently restore public services once the operation was over.

The reoccupation of the West Bank and the decline of the Palestinian Authority have also resulted in a rise in thuggish, shadowy attacks of the kind that Shikaki faced.

Over the past few months, Arafat has consolidated his position, undermining reformers and successfully installing loyalists in top positions. But many Palestin-

ian analysts say that no matter how much power Arafat grabs in the short-term, his long-term prospects look increasingly bleak. In October Israel threatened to "remove" him, and there have been endless reports that he's ill.

The result of the perceived weakening of Arafat's position, says Saib Zeedani, director of the Palestinian citizens' rights commission, "is a competition for power." And that, in turn, has fueled attacks on Palestinian journalists and academics like Shikaki. "If you criticize Mahmoud Dahlan for example," says Zeedani, referring to the former security chief in the Gaza who is favored by the U.S. as a moderate, "you should expect a response."

Bassem Eid, head of the Palestinian Human Rights Monitoring Group, also sees official hands at work in the attacks. "I didn't hear Arafat create investigations to look into what happened with the attacks. And what do you think that means?"

Still, "the fact that Shikaki has been able to undertake regular polling on the job performance, popularity, and approval rating of Arafat since the mid-1990s pretty much proves" that freedom continues to exist in Palestinian society, says Rex Brynen, a Middle East specialist at Canada's McGill University. "There are no such polls on King Abdullah or Hosni Mubarak."

But it's not hard to see the chilling effects the attacks can have.

Shikaki's controversial poll on the right of return generated intense criticism abroad, mainly from the Palestinian expatriate community. "Correct your wrongs, apologize for the lies, and resign your post for you have cast yourself into exile amongst the Palestinian community," charged one editorial on a Web site called *al-Jazeera* (not affiliated with the TV station). "You have failed yourself and the people."

Most TV, radio, and newspapers in the Palestinian territories had a different response: silence. "I sat down with *al-Quds* for an hour," recalls Shikaki, referring to the leading Palestinian paper. But "they didn't publish anything. I did a lengthy interview with a Palestinian radio station, and yet they never covered the poll." Shikaki says he became concerned about rumors that were spreading about the poll and tried to submit an ad to *al-Quds* detailing the poll results. The paper, says Shikaki, refused the ad. "They're timid," says Shikaki. "And in a situation of anarchy, it's better to stay away from controversial positions." ■

Eric Umansky writes the "Today's Papers" column for Slate.



J.J. GOLDBERG, editor, the *Forward*

FORWARD THINKING

So What If the *Goyim* Are Looking?
A Jewish Newspaper Lets It All Hang Out

BY GAL BECKERMAN

In his August 29 editorial, J.J. Goldberg, editor of the *Forward*, warned his readers not to be "startled" by that week's front-page op-ed. He knew he was playing jump rope with raw nerves. After all, American Jews, the paper's prime audience, could never have expected such heresy in a mainstream Jewish publication: "Israel, having ceased to care about the children of Palestinians, should not be surprised when they come washed in hatred and blow themselves up in the centers of Israeli escapism."

Surely this was an anti-Semite, head wrapped in a kaffiyah, holding a match to the Israeli flag. But he wasn't. The writer was Avraham Burg, a respected former speaker of the Israeli parliament. Goldberg simply had the gall to translate his words from Hebrew and put them on the *Forward's* front page.

Burg's piece, a rage-filled lament for an Israeli society "already collapsing like a

cheap Jerusalem wedding hall," first appeared in a major Israeli daily, *Yediot Ahronot*, and, although shocking, joined the debate that thunders continuously through the Israeli public arena. In the U.S., however, it's hard to imagine a Jewish newspaper other than the English-language *Forward* even touching it. Not only is much of the Jewish press in America lamely local — asking little more than the hard-hitting question, *Who was bar-mitzvahed this week?* — but, for the most part, their editorial line is filtered through one parochial prism: Is it good for the Jews? Bankrolled by local Jewish federations, the community weeklies lack the independence to report critically on the charities and institutions that make up Jewish organizational life. Dissent or even debate over Israeli policy is off limits. Like the American Jewish establishment, these papers swung left-of-center during the Oslo peace process in the 1990s and, for the three years since the start of the current Intifada, have swung right, staunchly defending the policies of Ariel Sharon.

Under two very different editors, as it happens, the *Forward*, during both periods, has gone counterclockwise.

Of the prominent American Jewish publications, the *Forward* alone, now in its thirteenth year, is truly independent. As a result, its op-ed page is a rare and influential forum (albeit an elite one, read by no more than 30,000) where the contentious ideological battles of the Jewish world are duked out — pro-peace vs. anti-negotiation, Orthodox vs. Reform, assimilationist vs. isolationist. And with the war on terror turning any critic of Israel into a suspected traitor, it has not recoiled from running pieces like Burg's that undermine the image of communal unity peddled by the American Jewish establishment.

On its news pages, meanwhile, the *Forward* covers the Jewish story as a story, seriously and dispassionately. Recent front-page articles have looked at a study claiming that 22 percent of Israeli households are malnourished, exposed the role of an Orthodox Jewish organization in supporting a



'The appropriate contrarian for his time'

conservative U.S. judicial nominee, and examined the unstable and insecure character of Jack Ruby (known to his Yiddish-speaking mother as Jacob Rubenstein). Its mandate

is wide, taking on issues as international as the reemergence of opium-growing in Afghanistan and as local as the conflict between Hasidic Jews and blacks in Brooklyn. And the *Forward* is one of the few publications keeping a close journalistic eye on the American Jewish establishment, ready to pounce when incompetence or corruption is uncovered.

So harshly scrutinizing is it at times that its critics fret that it allows anyone to peer at the community's often ugly internal disputes. But Steven Bayme, National Director of Contemporary Jewish Life at the American Jewish Committee, says that the *Forward* "gives you independent journalism, hard-hitting journalism, and it has become important precisely because it is willing to tackle sacred cows. The general sense is that a healthy community is one which can confront its weaknesses as well as its strengths. And the *Forward* forces us to look at those things."

Goldberg is fifty-four and has edited the paper for the last three years. He is a compact and fidgety man who, with owl glasses and hair split down the middle, looks like a grown-up Harry Potter. He wants the *Forward*, journalistically, to "reinvent a language that has been lost for seventy years." By this, he means finding a way to look at anything, economics or dance, from a uniquely Jewish perspective — but one that, rather than narrowing the world, widens to include as much of it as possible.

In this, Goldberg has stayed true to the initial idea of the paper as dreamt up by its charismatic founding editor, Seth Lipsky, formerly of *The Wall Street Journal*. In the spring of 2000, when Lipsky left the *Forward* in bitterness, a decade into its existence, editorials in *The New Republic* and the *Journal* declared the death of independent Jewish journalism. Over a thousand subscriptions were canceled. No one, it

seemed, was worthy of following the irreverent and visionary Lipsky. Certainly not Goldberg, with a background in the Jewish press. The *Forward*, which had been taken so seriously and produced journalists who went on to work at *The New Yorker* and *The New York Times*, under Goldberg would turn amateurish and provincial.

There was no way, it was thought, that Goldberg could correct the perceived errors that had got Lipsky ousted and be true to the long, distinguished tradition of the *Forward* name.

The original *Forward* (or *Forverts*), has existed in Yiddish for over a hundred years. For the millions of Eastern European Jews who emigrated to America (and mostly to the Lower East Side of New York) at the turn of the last century, the *Forward*, a mix of tabloid and literary journal, was a reflection of the working-class, green, striving, brash, and overwhelmingly socialist community that was settling in this country.

In its prime, the Yiddish *Forward* had a circulation of a quarter million (not to mention all those it was passed along to in stuffy sweatshops and on crowded street corners) and was the first national newspaper with multiple editions, long before *USA Today*. If the Jewish community had a voice, this was it, where socialists and communists fought it out, labor laws were explained, lonely young women had their questions about love answered, the proper use of a handkerchief was illustrated, and confused greenhorn fathers learned why their sons wanted to hit balls with a round wooden bat.

Part of the *Forward's* mission, as pursued by its founding editor, Abraham Cahan, was to help Jews assimilate into American society, get them to lose their Yiddish and take on English. "For that kind of paper to be successful was to put itself out of business," said Samuel Norich, executive director since 1998 of the *Forward* Association, the group that owns and runs the *Forward* franchise. And indeed, the Yiddish *Forward*, founded in 1897, is on its dying breath. Although lovingly sustained, it wheezes on with a mere 5,000 geriatric readers.

By the 1980s, the *Forward*, as influential as it had once been, was headed toward the attic of Jewish nostalgia (to be

tucked away with the schnorrers and schlimazels, the yentas and meshuggenas of yore). Then the idea of a *Forward* in English was born in the most unlikely of minds. Lipsky, an editor at *The Wall Street Journal*, highly secular and an outsider to the Jewish world, first conceived of a modern-day successor to the Yiddish *Forward*. Like the original *Forward*, the new paper would serve the needs of American Jews. But instead of teaching them how to assimilate into America, something they had already done quite successfully, it would teach secular Jews, long cut off from the sense of community engendered on the Lower East Side, to feel part of a living, kicking, dynamic culture. The *Forward*, as Lipsky envisioned it, would inform American Jews about the organizations that speak and lobby (and wield millions) in their name. And it would analyze local politics, the Middle East, the economy, immigration, and a range of other "secular" topics from a sophisticated and uniquely Jewish perspective.

It took Lipsky most of the 1980s to convince the *Forward* Association to give him a shot. As the guardians of the *Forward's* tradition, they were concerned about Lipsky's politics. The Yiddish *Forward* was, after all, a socialist paper of the working class. Before World War II, it was allied closely with trade unions, strongly supported socialist candidates like Eugene V. Debs, and even looked kindly at first on the Russian Revolution. Lipsky, on the other hand, is a self-proclaimed neoconservative who, although fairly liberal on social issues like abortion and gay rights, is a fiscal conservative and an unabashed geopolitical hawk.

As he made clear in a 1997 *Commentary* essay, Lipsky thought he could reconcile these polarities. He did this by arguing that the socialists of the 1920s would have naturally evolved into the neoconservatives of today. To make his point, he referred to the Yiddish *Forward's* increasing anti-Communism over the decades and its sympathetic 1940 obituary of Vladimir Jabotinsky, the grandfather of revisionist or right-wing Zionism. Lipsky wrote, "In fact, every time I have dipped into the files of the *Forward*, I have found editorials on Zionism and Israel rippling with verve and strength and hewing to what, in the contemporary context, can only be called a hard line."

Anyone wanting to be editor of the *Forward* would have to contend with the overwhelming memory of Abraham Cahan, independent, opinionated, and daring, who ran the Yiddish paper for more than fifty years. And in this capacity Lipsky fit

the bill. A lifelong journalist, he had reported for *Stars and Stripes* during Vietnam, and had spent years as an editor at *Time* and then the *Journal*. By all accounts, Lipsky could be described best in one word: newspaperman. Not the modern antiseptic version of the creature, but the old-fashioned, stir-the-pot, hard-headed incarnation. "Curious, direct, oblivious to protocol, always provocative," was the way Albert R. Hunt of the *Journal* summed him up in an elegiac 2000 column.

In 1990 the Forward Association finally agreed to create the new *Forward* and give Lipsky editorial control. He took it and ran. On the news pages, the *Forward* tackled a mixture of local and national news, stories like the Crown Heights riots and Patrick Buchanan's victory in the New Hampshire primary; international stories about Russian Jews and Hezbollah; and stories that turned a laser beam on the Jewish establishment, skewering its leaders and scrutinizing its charities. The arts and letters pages became a space for irreverent creativity, serializing Philip Roth's *Operation Shylock* and Art Spiegelman's Pulitzer Prize-winning comic strip, *Maus*. The design was bold — large photos and drawings — and the reviews and idea pieces meandered through subjects as diverse as sex in Israeli cinema and a new opera about the Dreyfus Affair.

Lipsky won't talk about his time at the *Forward* (testament to the bitterness of his eventual break-up with the Forward Association), but the accounts of the young writers he groomed during his time there are filled with romance and nostalgia, dominated by the eccentric figure of their former editor. Lipsky wore hats, they say. He painted portraits of his heroes, like Menachem Begin, which he hung in his office. He told the writers that their era was akin to Paris in the twenties. A decade later, they still have Lipsky stories in which their former editor sounds like a combination of W.C. Fields and William Randolph Hearst. Philip Gourevitch, now at *The New Yorker*, remembers Lipsky offering him the job of New York bureau chief. "Do you own a necktie?" Lipsky barked at him. When Gourevitch answered yes, Lipsky inquired if he had any reporting experience. No, Gourevitch answered. "Good, no bad habits." E.J. Kessler, still at the paper and now its deputy managing editor, recalls Lipsky walking into the newsroom and asking her for her front-page news story. She didn't have one. She had written the lead art piece that week. "That's just chat," he answered. "I want scoops."

Lipsky did indeed want scoops. And he

wanted them plastered on the front page in giant headlines like JEWISH DAY SCHOOL PUPILS FLUNK READING TEST AT RATES THAT DISCLOSE POCKETS OF WEAKNESS, OR HIGH HOLIDAY TICKETS ARE PRICEY AND SCARCE/A RABBI EXPLAINS: 'I HAVE TO EAT AND MY CHILDREN HAVE TO EAT.' He loved controversy. When a Jewish charity was contemplating awarding Yasir Arafat a peace prize in 1999, Lipsky put a picture of the Palestinian leader on the front page with the headline, YOUR CHARITY DOLLARS AT WORK? He ran stories that Jews did not want to see about themselves, like one about a Jewish stripper — "I would dance topless but not on Shabbat" — or one about a protest in Israel in which secular Jews handed out ham-and-cheese sandwiches to protest new rules privileging the religious — IN JERUSALEM, HAM N' CHEESE — ON WRY.

On the editorial page, Lipsky's neo-conservative views managed to consis-



'... without Lipsky, the garden will die'

tently upset many people. Not necessarily a bad move, except that those he seemed to prick most were his benefactors, the left-leaning Forward Association. And, according to Samuel Norich, Lipsky's political sensibility "manifested itself not only on the editorial page, but also in the headlines, on the front page, in the spin of news articles." On economic issues, Norich says, Lipsky "consistently called for lower marginal tax rates — what we felt was the shredding of the social safety net." On Israel, Norich says, Lipsky was constantly to the right of the Israeli government, "never between the Israeli government and the Arabs."

Lipsky had started as an employee of the Forward Association. But in 1995 he and three partners bought half of the paper. This further emboldened his editorial independence. Norich insists that Lipsky continued to ignore an "unwritten understanding that he would take our views into account."

In 2000 the association finally decided to assert some editorial oversight and Lipsky, predictably, resisted. There was no easy solution. Although circulation had stagnated after 1997, losing the *Forward* vast sums of money (an average of \$2 million a year), it was Lipsky who had put the paper on the map. When the impasse seemed too great, Lipsky and his financial backers, most prominently the philanthropist Michael Steinhardt, proposed buying the whole paper. But as half-owners, the Forward Association could block the deal. And that is what its leaders did, telling Lipsky he could either leave the paper or they would kill it. Lipsky chose to quit.

To the Lipsky loyalists, the parting was bitter and acrimonious. "They made it out like an octogenarian politburo had offed a bright young star of independent thinking," said Norich. In fact, Lipsky's staff saw it mostly for what it was — a conflict of ideology and personality. Ira Stoll, an editor at the paper for five years who has since followed Lipsky to his new venture, the year-and-a-half-old daily, *The New York Sun*, put it this way: "You had a newspaper that had two fifty-percent owners, the Forward Association and Lipsky-Steinhardt LLC — rough shorthand: the socialists and the capitalists — and they couldn't agree on how to go forward. The capitalist side wanted to put more money in and take majority control. The socialist side didn't want to sell. So basically, the capitalists sold their half to the socialists. And the socialists got a new editor."

When Lipsky left, so did all but three of the entire editorial staff. The *Forward* would be worthless without Lipsky, they thought. It would turn into just another Jewish community weekly, without nerve or pluck. Jonathan Mahler, at one point the editorial page editor at the *Forward*, wrote in *The New Republic*, "Seth Lipsky arrived at a desert and built a beautiful garden. Now the land's owners want it back. What they don't realize is that, without Lipsky, the garden will die anyway."

We don't deride. We don't scandalize. We fundamentally expect that people of good will are doing their best," J.J. Goldberg says, sitting in his midtown Manhattan office. "And when they screw up, we say so. And we are looking for that stuff. But it is not our job to play gotcha. We start with a basic respect for the job of doing the community's work."

Goldberg was the Forward Associa-

tion's antidote to Lipsky. The son of a union lawyer, he grew up with a strong background in Labor Zionism. He also speaks fluent Hebrew, having lived on a kibbutz for a few years in the seventies, and has spent his life invested in and involved with the Jewish world. Unlike Lipsky, he had a strong grounding in Jewish history and culture. His political beliefs lined up more directly with the Yiddish paper's. But the very background that recommended him for the job in the Forward Association's eyes also created an "image problem," as Goldberg himself put it. Lipsky's achievement, it was thought, stemmed from his outsider status and long experience in the mainstream press. Goldberg was coming from the inside. He knew the players personally, had lifelong relationships with them, and had mostly worked for Jewish publications like *The Jewish Week*. When he arrived at an empty newsroom, he began filling it with Jewish-press colleagues. "One of the Lipsky people came in to tell me he was leaving," Goldberg remembered. "And he said, 'You've confirmed my fear that this is going to become another mediocre, sycophantic Jewish community weekly.'"

But it hasn't. The garden has not died.

Goldberg has not run away from Lipsky's model of using the Jewish story to tell a wider story. He just wants to do "what Lipsky did but in a liberal way."

"He published a paper that, more than any other Jewish weekly, covered issues like the economy and social and cultural debates in a deep kind of way," says Goldberg. "Now and again, he would have an article that would have no obvious Jewish connection about tax rates or the international monetary system which was deeply conservative. I want to do the same thing, but liberal."

Lipsky, Goldberg says, would "want to do an exposé on who was threatening to divide Jerusalem. I would want to do an exposé on who was threatening to disrupt efforts to make peace."

Editorially, the greatest difference between the two is Goldberg's belief in the paper's traditional liberalism and the need to connect stories to their Jewish roots. "To me, the values of Judaism, the culture and tradition that evolve from the bible through the Talmud, through the rabbinic era to modern Yiddish literature is a seamless line," Goldberg says, drawing a difference between himself and Lipsky. "And if you don't know that, then none of it makes sense."

But Goldberg, although he doesn't aim to be as needling (some would say, mean) as Lipsky, still wants to take a magnifying glass to the Jewish establishment. In fact, in 1996, he published a book, provocatively titled *Jewish Power*, which was the first real deconstruction of the American Jewish organizational world. Goldberg is no apologist for the Jewish establishment. Besides running the Burg piece, in recent months he has also published a controversial op-ed by Natan Sharansky, an Israeli government minister, which hammered American Jewish organizations for not inspiring Jewish college students to fight campus anti-Zionism. Also recently, Goldberg loudly disputed the findings of a Jewish population survey. The study forecast the imminent disappearance of the American Jew, because of intermarriage and assimilation. Goldberg thought the numbers were manipulated to create a bleak and pessimistic outlook useful for fundraising. He said so, in his pages and in a *New York Times* op-ed, and it didn't make him any friends in the Jewish establishment.

On Israel, Goldberg's liberal tendencies have acted as a counterbalance to the general rightward shift of the American Jewish community. Like Lipsky in the 1990s, prophetically skeptical about Oslo when it was embraced by most American Jews, Goldberg seems to be "the appropriate contrarian for his time," says Ami Eden, the *Forward's* current national editor.

Comparing Lipsky and Goldberg's *Forward*, you see a paper that is now considerably less operatic (and therefore, maybe, less provoking). But it is still the most serious source of Jewish news around. This remains true, because Goldberg, like Lipsky, doesn't care if Jews don't see the best of themselves reflected in its pages, or if they don't agree or are shocked or offended by pieces, like Burg's, that make Jews feel self-conscious. If there is one thing that connects Goldberg and Lipsky, it is a confidence that the community is mature and strong enough to take it, that dissent is in fact the most Jewish practice they could be engaged in.

"The genius of the Talmud is that it created an atmosphere of dissent," says Jonathan Rosen, who, under Lipsky, conceived of and edited the *Forward's* Arts and Letters pages. "It's not that the individual things debated don't matter. But the culture of the Talmud is its greatest contribution. And that's a culture in which dissent and dispute and skepticism are in themselves godly activities." ■

Gal Beckerman is an assistant editor at CJR.

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A FALL FROM GRACE

A Slip into Stereotype, and a Writer Learns the Fragility of Reputation

BY DOUGLAS MCCOLLAM

Gregg Easterbrook was feeling pretty steamed. It was early morning on Monday, October 13, and Easterbrook, a senior editor at *The New Republic*, was sitting at his computer preparing to write the latest entry for "Easterblogg," a Weblog he'd launched on *TNR's* Web site five weeks earlier. Easterbrook had begun the blog at the request of Peter Beinart, *TNR's* thirty-two-year-old editor, who was eager to get the magazine into the burgeoning blogosphere and thought that Easterbrook, a polymath who seemingly could write with authority on everything from global warming to football, was perfect for the job.

One of Easterbrook's recurring interests is the impact on teenagers of violence in Hollywood films. In a 1999 feature story for *The New Republic* in the wake of the Columbine killings, he condemned violent movies like *Scream*, in which twisted teenagers kill their friends. More recently, Easterbrook had used his new blog to chide Mel Gibson, wondering if his new film about the crucifixion of Christ, *The Passion*, would be "a crass attempt to commercialize Jesus's death via exaggerated gore," given Gibson's record of violent films.

That Monday morning Easterbrook had another movie in his sights: Quentin Tarantino's just-released revenge flick *Kill Bill — Vol. 1*. Easterbrook, who had seen the movie over the weekend, was disgusted by its graphic violence and said so in his blog piece. Particularly galling to him was that the movie was being released by Miramax, a division of the Walt Disney Company, ostensibly a family-oriented corporation. As he reached the end of the piece Easterbrook wanted to expand upon the themes of religious values and movie violence that he had raised in the Gibson piece the week before. He wrote:



Set aside what it says about Hollywood that today even *Disney* thinks what the public needs is ever-more-graphic depictions of killing the innocent as cool amusement. Disney's CEO, Michael Eisner, is Jewish; the chief of Miramax, Harvey Weinstein, is Jewish. Yes, there are plenty of Christian and other Hollywood executives who worship money above all else, promoting for profit the adulation of violence. Does that make it right for Jewish executives to worship money above all else, by promoting for profit the adulation of violence? Recent European history alone ought to cause Jewish executives to experience second thoughts about glorifying the killing of the helpless as a fun lifestyle choice.

The piece went straight from Easterbrook to the Web site and was posted at 9:24 a.m.

A day or two later, Easterbrook got a phone call from Beinart expressing serious reservations about the language he had used, especially his reference to "Jewish executives" who "worship money above all else," words that brought to mind a durable stereotype. Looking at his

piece again Easterbrook agreed it could be seen as offensive. The two discussed whether Easterbrook should edit the language, but agreed it would be a bit Orwellian to change the article after the fact. Also, Easterbrook recalls thinking, the article was just an unnoticed blog piece; why cause a fuss? They decided to leave it alone, but Beinart cautioned Easterbrook to run future articles "like that" past the editors.

Later, after he'd been pilloried in the pages of *The New York Times*, the *Los Angeles Times*, and in dozens of other newspapers, magazines, and Web sites; after he'd been denounced by the Anti-Defamation League as a bigot and fired from a lucrative job writing for ESPN.com; and when it seemed possible, briefly, that Michael Eisner, one of the most powerful men in media, might be out to destroy his career, Easterbrook had a simple thought about that Wednesday-afternoon conversation with Beinart: "If we'd just pressed the delete key, all this never would have happened."

The way Easterbrook almost destroyed in a matter of minutes a career built on twenty years of excellence is a strange and sad tale of the Internet age, in which writers can broadcast ideas to the world almost as fast as they can type. An early graduate of Charlie Peters's writing academy at *The Washington Monthly*, Easterbrook has long stood out for what Jack Shafer, media critic at *Slate*, termed his "hyper-logical" journalism. While writing for *The New Yorker*, *The Atlantic Monthly*, *Wired*, *Slate*, *The New Republic*, and other top magazines and newspapers, Easterbrook has shown a unique ability to master arcane subjects and transform them into page-turning stories. In 1980, for example, he wrote a feature story for *The Washington Monthly* labeling the nascent space shuttle a "death trap," almost six years before *Challenger* blew up. He has published six books, including the contrarian *A Moment On The*

Earth, which sounded an optimistic note on the environment that enraged environmental activists. Oddly, however, Easterbrook's widest readership was achieved not through writing on religion, science, or social policy, but through his goofy and often brilliant sports column, "Tuesday Morning Quarterback," which began on *Slate*, and which Easterbrook moved to ESPN.com in 2002. TMQ, as readers call it, is a weekly tour-de-force in which Easterbrook contemplates the mysteries of NFL football through the lens of quantum physics, Japanese haiku, federal antitrust policy, and the light-bending properties of cheerleading megabases.

So how exactly did a writer known for his intellectual rigor and spiritual tolerance stray into a bout of anti-Semitic rambling? That was still a puzzle to the writer himself when I sat down with him at *TNR* in November. His office overlooks the New York Avenue Presbyterian Church, where President Lincoln worshiped and where an early draft of the Emancipation Proclamation is displayed in the Lincoln parlor. Easterbrook said he considers it one of the most historically significant buildings in Washington.

Religion has long been an important subject in Easterbrook's writing, particularly the attempt to reconcile the competing traditions of skeptical inquiry and spiritual faith. His 1998 book, *Beside Still Waters*, argued that neither science nor religion is fully equipped to answer fundamental ontological questions, and attempted to synthesize the best elements of both. Easterbrook is also a founding staff member and frequent contributor to *Beliefnet*, a Web site dedicated to multi-faith religious writing. From the beginning, Easterbrook envisioned the *TNR* blog as giving him space and freedom to write more about religion.

That interest contributed directly to the *Kill Bill* controversy. Easterbrook believes that everyone, Hollywood stars and media moguls included, should at least consider whether their religious values ought to apply to their professional lives. It's a potentially troubling argument, he admits, and one that he badly mangled in his references to Eisner and Weinstein (and perhaps irrelevant, given that Jewish ethnicity is not necessarily an indicator of faith). But it is undeniably an Easterbrookian idea, one that recurs in his writing. So it is not surprising that Easterbrook felt that raising Eisner's and Weinstein's religious orientation was fair game.

From that starting point Easterbrook's argument essentially was that Eisner and Weinstein should be more sensitive to the glorification of casual violence given the history of violence against Jews. Easterbrook now says that holding the executives to a higher standard than others because of their Jewishness was "simply wrong." But at the time he wrote it, he

erbrook began to better understand how heavily freighted his words had been. *The New Republic*, ironically, "has spent a generation writing about Jews, Israel, and the elimination of prejudice," as the magazine would later put it. That Thursday night Easterbrook posted an apology.

When he read Weinraub's story in the *Times* the next day he found it embar-

'This is fitting punishment. This wraps it up,' Easterbrook said. It did not wrap it up.

saying but fair. And that, Easterbrook supposed, would be the end of the controversy. "I thought this was fitting punishment for what I did," Easterbrook says. "I've had to apologize. I've now been humiliated by an article in the *Times*. In terms of the cosmic wheel, this is fitting punishment. This wraps it up."

It did not wrap it up. Some found Easterbrook's apology less than abject. "It was basically 'if what I said bothered anyone, then I'm sorry.' That's not an apology," says Abraham Foxman, director of the Anti-Defamation League, which issued a statement condemning Easterbrook. That also was the reaction of John Skipper, executive vice-president of ESPN. "It was like what a lot of athletes say: 'I was misunderstood. That's not what I meant.' It was clumsy." Easterbrook politely disagrees with his critics on that point. "If you read carefully, I admitted that bringing up their Jewish identity was simply wrong," Easterbrook says. "I did unilaterally retract that aspect of it."

But Skipper says he felt he had to act. He first learned of the controversy reading Weinraub's story Friday morning while on a flight from New York to St. Louis. When he landed, he called his office in New York and asked that a copy of the *Kill Bill* story and Easterbrook's apology be sent to his BlackBerry, and asked Neal Scarbrough, editor in chief at ESPN.com, to call Easterbrook and see if there were any mitigating circumstances. Finding none, Skipper decided that afternoon to fire Easterbrook. "I looked at the article and I thought it was anti-Semitic," says Skipper, who retains the slow drawl of his North Carolina roots. Skipper insists the network's recent problem with Rush Limbaugh was not a significant factor in the Easterbrook decision. Some had criticized ESPN for not firing Lim-

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baugh more quickly from the network's Sunday pre-game football show after his odd observation that the Philadelphia Eagles quarterback Donovan McNabb was overrated by the liberal press because he was African-American.

Since ESPN is owned by Disney, the question arose: Did Eisner have anything to do with Skipper's decision to fire Easterbrook? Skipper denies it emphatically. "I still have had no discussion with anyone from the Walt Disney Company on this," he said. "It was my strong intent that this not be elevated; that I make the decision." (Eisner did not respond to calls.)

Back in Washington things weren't looking much better for Easterbrook. At *The New Republic*, Peter Beinart asked some staff people to spend the weekend combing through Easterbrook's past work to make sure he hadn't written anything similarly offensive. (They gave him a clean bill.) He and Beinart also began personally responding to *New Republic* readers who, by this time, were phoning in to complain. Easterbrook estimates he apologized to a couple of dozen readers personally. All but one of the conversations ended amicably. At the *Los Angeles Times*, the writer Tim Rutten was preparing a column attacking Easterbrook as anti-Semitic.

Most ominous of all to Easterbrook, he got word from a source that Michael Eisner was livid about the piece and was personally going to use his influence to punish him. The prospect filled Easterbrook with dread. He'd already lost about half his annual income when ESPN canned him (and expunged all his columns from its archives). The rumor about Eisner also concerned Eric Dezenhall, a Washington media consultant who was helping Easterbrook manage the crisis. Dezenhall, along with Easterbrook, belongs to one of the few joint Christian-Jewish congregations in the nation. He is Jewish, and says he was as surprised as anyone when he read the *Kill Bill* piece, but still thought the controversy was quickly growing into a witch-hunt. He offered his services pro bono.

The first thing Dezenhall told Easterbrook was that it would be difficult to mount a self-defense: "The problem is anytime you try to explain prejudice you get into a 'some of my best friends are...' type thing." Instead, Dezenhall advised Easterbrook to rally others to his defense. On October 18, Easterbrook did just that, sending out an all-points e-mail to a network of media contacts asking them to come to his aid. It recounted the hits he had taken in the media and expressed concern that Eisner was out to destroy his forthcoming book, *The Progress Paradox*, by keeping him off talk shows, blocking a serialization deal, or even prevailing upon Random House to kill the book outright. (The e-mail also made clear that Easterbrook suspected Eisner was behind the push to fire him from ESPN.com.)

But Easterbrook says that by later that same day he heard — from the same source at Disney — that the earlier warnings about Eisner's wrath had been a false alarm. Still, by Sunday Easterbrook was working with Dezenhall and Roger Hertog on letters to Eisner and Harvey Weinstein apologizing for his column. That weekend he also contacted Roger Simon and other influential bloggers who had ripped him earlier in the week to ask their advice about responding to the controversy. They responded favorably. "He became a twenty-four-hour crisis management unit," says Dezenhall. "A lot of damage control comes down to moral equity — what do we think of you? Do we like you? The greatest asset Gregg had going for him is that people like him."

By Monday, Easterbrook's frantic efforts seemed to be paying off. In a follow-up e-mail thanking those who had supported him, Easterbrook reported that he thought the crisis had largely passed. *The New Republic* issued a separate apology to its readers, which the Anti-Defamation League accepted in a follow-up press release. Pieces by Jack Shafer and Mickey Kaus on *Slate* scolded Easterbrook for his faulty logic, but defended his character. The crisis probably officially ended on Friday, October 24, when Charles Krauthammer, a stalwart champion of Israel and Jewish affairs, wrote a piece in *The Washington Post*, calling Easterbrook's *Kill Bill* blog "clumsy and stupid," but saying enough was enough: "the idea of destroying someone's reputation and career over a single slip of this type is not just ridiculous, but vindictive."

By early December, when I last spoke to Easterbrook for this story, he was cautiously optimistic that he might emerge from the incident relatively unscathed, though he still was worried about how it would affect sales of his new book. After a brief hiatus, Easterblog was back and going strong, though it was now inspected by *TNR* editors before being posted. *TMQ* had also returned, though on a new Web site, *NFL.com*, the league's official site. Harvey Weinstein, head of Miramax, had written to accept Easterbrook's apology. Eisner, though, had yet to respond, which clearly troubles Easterbrook. "If he wants me to engage in a public discussion of the dangers of stereotyping and how I learned about them I would be willing to do that," Easterbrook told me. "If it happened, that would be a Disney happy ending, I suppose. Since it is Disney there should be a happy ending, right?"

We'll have to wait and see. *Kill Bill* — Vol. 2 should be out soon. ■

Douglas McCollam is a contributing editor to *CJR*.

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Ever Wonder Why They Won't?

They've Been Media-Trained. And the Public Is the Loser

BY TRUDY LIEBERMAN

Last July, just as the weapons inspector David Kay was about to brief a congressional committee on what he had found in Iraq, National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice appeared on Jim Lehrer's *NewsHour*.

The host, Gwen Ifill, asked whether Kay had given the president new information. Rice said the president told Kay to take his time, search in a comprehensive way, in a way that makes the case and looks at all the evidence and tells us the truth. She added that the president wanted Kay to know that we are patient in finding out. She did not answer the question.

Ifill tried again. "So David Kay did not bring the president new information about new discoveries at that meeting yesterday?" Ifill asked. Rice wouldn't budge. "I think that there is a danger in taking a little piece of evidence here, a little piece of evidence there. He is a very respected and capable weapons inspec-

unspoken rules of acceptable journalistic behavior on the other. Television guests tiptoe around the questions while interviewers either lose control or throw out softballs aimed at making sure their subjects will want to come back. Media training, a competitive and growing industry, teaches people all the fancy steps they need to answer the questions they want to answer, not those of an inquisitive reporter. The result: in too many cases, interviews become excuses to practice public relations, and instead of shedding light, they cloud public discourse. The captive public sits and watches the waltz glide by.

"About all we interview any more are professional talkers," says Bob Schieffer, who tries to squeeze informational tidbits from those talkers every Sunday on CBS's *Face the Nation*. The professional part, of course, stems from who his guests are, mainly public officials. But it also flows from the teachings of media trainers, a branch of public relations that originated at J. Walter Thompson in the mid-1970s. Media training was

not have press secretaries, let alone coaches to show them how to behave in front of a camera. Today it's a rare public soul who has not been media trained. The risks are higher for the untrained person, says Joyce Newman, who heads The Newman Group, a New York training firm: "Anything seen or said tracks you forever, and can come back to smack you in the face." So politicians, government bureaucrats, and as many as 70 percent of corporate CEOs are taught how to parry reporters' questions and deliver predetermined messages. Even flower sellers coached by the Society of American Florists know they should talk about the color of roses when reporters call about price gouging on Valentine's Day.

As journalism has morphed into a cog in a great public relations machine, the fundamental relationship between journalists and their subjects has changed, turning the craft of the interview on its head. Where once journalists took the lead, prepared in depth for interviews, zeroed in on specifics, and connected the dots for their audience, those

being questioned now lead the way, coached precisely

Interviews become excuses to practice public relations

tor. He knows how to read the Iraqi programs." Although Rice had avoided the follow-up, Ifill let her continue with the administration's pitch for war, laced with such phrases as "brutal dictator" and "ideologies of hatred."

The interview served up no new evidence of weapons of mass destruction, and the exchange between Ifill and Rice illustrated what a CBS correspondent, Steve Hartman, calls the "orchestrated dance where nobody gets at the truth." It's a dance choreographed by media trainers on the one hand and by unwritten and

largely a dual response to the tough questioning of Mike Wallace and others on *60 Minutes* and the needs of the new business-media outlets that called for a constant stream of corporate executives to chat on the air. Soon other p.r. firms established media training practices, sensing a lucrative sideline in coaching people to handle tough questions.

For \$4,000 to \$10,000 a day, trainers who are as ethically and intellectually diverse as journalists themselves teach the art of performing for the press. Thirty years ago many members of Congress did

on how to wrest control. Never assume knowledge on the part of the reporter, trainers counsel, and think of the interview as a collaboration, not a confrontation. To that end, The CommCore Observer, a monthly e-mail sent to clients by The CommCore Consulting Group, one of the country's largest media training firms, advises clients "to prepare for media interviews as if they are educating the reporter. Much like a teacher develops a lesson plan, the interviewee can set context, provide perspective and control the direction of the interview."

At a time when the audience makes decisions based on perceptions rather than facts, the goal is to create positive perceptions of companies and their products, politicians and their policies. The techniques, however, are the same, and the effect on the audience is the same as well: the control of information. Journalists are losing that control, says James Carey, a journalism professor at Columbia. "The upper hand has shifted to the public relations apparatus and other groups. People show up on news shows for an explicit avowed political or commercial purpose." They are interested in journalists, Carey maintains, only as a conduit for their own interests and outlook. How they perform that function in the stream of mass communications gets to the nuts and bolts of media training.

GAINING THE UPPER HAND

■ **Taking control** One of the first rules of media training is to seize control of the interview, and skillful guests can do it from the very beginning.

An NPR *Talk of the Nation* program in October, which examined the regulatory efforts of the Food and Drug Administration, showed how it's done. The program host, Korva Coleman, asked Peter Van Doren, an editor at the conservative Cato Institute, whether the FDA's scientific panels ask the right questions when they review scientific data for new drugs and medical devices. "Well, I think so," he said, adding quickly: "What I'd like to talk about is just the mistaken premises that some people have, mostly the public, I think, about what science can or can't do," which launched him into his message about the costs and benefits of regulation and personal choice.

When interviewees twist an interview to fit their agenda, they are in effect warning the questioner what to avoid and signaling how they want to structure the questions. Senator John Warner of Virginia did it when he challenged correspondent Andrea Mitchell on NBC's *Meet the Press* last summer. When Mitchell asked him whether the president had sent Iraqis a taunting message to go after U.S. troops, he replied that it was not a taunting message, and said: "I want to turn to this other thing" — which was a discussion of how other nations were working with the U.S. in Iraq. At another

point, Mitchell tried to press him on the hunt for weapons of mass destruction. Warner said he wished his fellow Senator Mark Dayton had not said the U.S. should stop looking for weapons, then he signaled he did not want to linger on that topic, saying to Mitchell, "Let's move on to other matters. I think we've covered this." The conversation moved to security problems in Iraq. Later in the interview Warner was more explicit and asked: "Can we touch Africa?" Mitchell replied: "I want to talk about Africa, exactly," and the interview steered away from a touchy subject: the timetable for stabilizing Iraq.

■ **Dodging the question** Some media trainers counsel clients not to answer the question that's asked, but instead to give a response that fits with the message they plan to deliver. Others insist that's deceptive and urge clients to at least acknowledge or "satisfy" the question and then steer or bridge to their messages. Being asked if the sky is blue and answering that the grass is green is out of vogue, they say.

"You don't have to say what you don't want to say. But you must acknowledge the question," says Davia Temin, president of Temin and Company, a strategic-marketing and crisis-management firm. Saying "no comment," though, is not advised since it's seen as an admission of guilt. Nevertheless, says the longtime New York p.r. executive Richard Weiner:

'These people are not adversaries who pretend to be friends. They are friends who pretend to be adversaries'

"There are twenty-seven different ways to avoid the question and twenty-seven ways to say no comment."

When guests don't want to answer, they use phrases such as: That's such a complex subject . . . Your question is not relevant . . . You bring up an interesting point, but before I discuss it, I want to talk about . . . Such dodges serve as a springboard to the message the guest wants to send. On *Good Morning America* in November Charles Gibson asked General Richard Myers, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, if he had honestly expected so many soldiers to be in harm's way more than six months after hostilities officially ended. Myers responded not with a yes or no, but with: "You know, the Iraqi situation was complex from the start. I think we knew it was going to be very, very tough. And we've got to take the fight to them." The rest of his answer touched on Iraqis helping the U.S., intel-

ligence, and a newly found weapons cache — a classic example of the satisfy-and-steer technique drummed into every person who undergoes media training.

On CNN's *American Morning* in October, it was clear that Howard Dean would have preferred not to answer Bill Hemmer's question about whether he had supported cutting Medicare in 1995. Instead, the candidate took several detours, criticizing the way the Medicare program is run and talking about prescription drug benefits in Vermont, until Hemmer finally pinned him down by putting Dean's own words up on the screen.

■ **Telling a story** The best way to answer questions is to tell a story, says Bill McGowan, whose firm, Biomentary, of Dobbs Ferry, New York, trains business executives. Telling a story eats up time, precludes a follow-up, and supports your message.

Virgil Scudder, an avuncular figure who has been in the training business almost from the beginning, also believes in the tell-a-story pedagogy. "Winners come in with a story to tell and know how to tell it; losers just answer questions," he says. "Answering questions is like paying a toll on the toll road. You have to do it, but you're there to take a trip." The best trips offer anecdotes, examples, and third-party proof such as polls and words from significant historians or even *The New York Times*.

Once the story is told, says Jerry Doyle, CommCore's senior vice president, never "break back into jail" — that is, never repeat or return to the original question, which may invite reporters to stay on a line of questioning you want to avoid. Instead, provide context, which can disarm the questioner.

■ **Spreading the word** "The evidence of a good interview is not just getting out alive, it's what gets repeated," says Doyle. "Good politicians can see the headlines as they are saying them. They know what survives the editor's knife." In other words, they are trained to speak in compelling sound bites that have a chance of recirculating the next day, thus reinforcing the basic message being sold. In early November Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld appeared on *Fox News Sunday*. The host, Tony Snow, observed that the Iraqi people didn't like being occupied and wanted U.S. troops out sooner rather than later.

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Rumsfeld said he had seen polls suggesting that the Iraqis were worried the U.S. would leave too soon, and then moved into his sound bite for the next day's paper. "I agree with you, foreign troops in a country are unnatural. And the goal is not to keep them there. The goal is to keep them there only as long as they're needed and not one day longer." Sure enough, in the next day's *New York Times*, Rumsfeld's quote appeared in a page one story discussing the challenges the president faces in bringing stability to Iraq and maintaining public support.

■ **Answering the easy part** When journalists ask a two-part question, it's a gift to the guest, who will rarely answer both parts. Coaches advise clients to tackle the easy question and go on at some length. That way the interviewer can't remind them that they didn't answer the other question, which is left hanging for the audience. Last September on CNN Paula Zahn interviewed Governor George Pataki of New York. Zahn observed that there were some strong allegations that the Bush administration through the EPA had misled New Yorkers about air quality after 9/11. "Is there anything you can say that will help make the population any more comfortable? And were New Yorkers misled?" Zahn asked. Pataki did not seem interested in challenging the EPA. He answered only the first part of Zahn's question. "We relied on the EPA's analysis," Pataki said. "And I know right now, the city and the federal government are conducting a joint investigation into the health consequences. It is something that we have to be concerned about."

■ **Pitching platitudes** When guests send out platitudes — that is, say nice things about the people they may ultimately criticize or appear to disagree with on the air — media trainers say there's really subtle communication that's taking place. When Condoleezza Rice calls David Kay "a very respected and capable weapons inspector," when Senator John Warner refers to General Ricardo Sanchez as a "very fine and able officer" and to Senator Richard Lugar as "my distinguished friend and chairman," they are really sending a signal: don't look further for conflict between us. Such platitudes are a necessary thing in politics, says CommCore's Doyle. If they're missing from the conversation, the reporter might get suspicious and look deeper.

JOURNALISTS PLAY THE GAME

Increasingly, follow-up questions, which ideally should plug the gaps in an answer, are becoming casualties in the verbal joust between journalists and their well-trained guests, and too often softball questions have replaced hardball. Virgil Scudder observes what his profession has wrought: "The biggest failing of reporters today

Even flower sellers know they should talk about the color of roses when reporters call about price gouging on Valentine's Day

is not pinning down or following up. And they will ask a question too loosely constructed. It leaves too large a hole to go through." Sometimes the hole is so large, the guest isn't sure how to respond. In an interview last summer with Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage, Fox's Greta Van Susteren said she wanted to ask him about North Korea. Her question: "All right, what about North Korea?" Armitage replied: "A bad situation. What about it?" Van Susteren answered: "Well, what are we going to do about it, if anything?"

While open-ended questions allow guests to start talking, they also offer them a broad platform to hawk their messages. Corporate executives can drive right through such questions as: What's your biggest challenge? How did you achieve those great earnings? Why is marketing changing? Politicians can do the same when interviewers ask: How do you explain that? Is there something to that? What about the charge that the president has politicized this whole issue? Emphasizing the point, Scudder says "most business interviews are extremely supportive and a piece of cake." Questions with obvious answers provide yet another venue for message peddling. When the *NewHour* correspondent Jeffrey Brown asks the administrator of NASA if the culture of his agency can be fixed, is it a surprise when he replies "Oh, absolutely" and goes on with his pitch? When Paula Zahn asks Senator Joseph Lieberman to respond to Barbara Bush's comments "that you and your Democratic colleagues are a pretty sorry group," does she really expect him to say, Yes we are? Of course Lieberman said they weren't and moved to an attack on the president.

There are many reasons for the lack of follow-up questions. News interviews are brief and interviewers may have four or five questions the show's producer expects them to ask. Extra questions may mean the interviewer can't stick to a pre-determined script, perhaps leading to second-guessing by higher ups. With broadcast organizations now profitable members of business conglomerates, interviewers may be unsure how far they can go. One media trainer says that in the time of Edward R. Murrow and Fred Friendly, journalists could bully their guests because they knew CBS was behind

them. "They can't be as abusive as they used to be," she says. So unwritten rules now dictate acceptable behavior. Ask questions too harshly, and you're outside the club. Says Columbia's Carey: "These people are not adversaries who pretend to be friends. They are friends who pretend to be adversaries." Bob Schieffer explains, "You don't want to appear rude even though the guest can be filibustering and killing time, and you can't ask what you want." Schieffer's colleague Steve Hartman says interviewers must be careful not to cut the guest off too soon or "you're going to be perceived as someone who has a bias. Everyone is concerned about how they come across in this game." They also know unhappy guests can complain. Indeed, The CommCore Observer suggests that clients meet with editors "when a reporter is not being fair or balanced." If journalists stray out of bounds, they risk embarrassment or ostracism, like one reporter at a White House press conference in early October who asked press secretary Scott McClellan five times whether the Bush administration had a double standard when it came to investigating leaks — until an exasperated McClellan cut him off, effectively signaling: I've had enough of your behavior. Says Ronald Sims, a business professor at The College of William and Mary: "The good questioners are marginalized. Everyone knows the bulldog that doesn't let go. Word gets around. Colleagues give looks. There are unwritten rules that this is not how you act so you go with the flow." Few questioners want to be known as a bulldog. The hot guests, the "big gets" as they are known in the business, will go elsewhere. Few p.r. executives want to book someone on a show where the interviewer has a reputation for rough questioning. Most would rather have their clients interviewed by Larry King than by Mike Wallace.

Even when journalists do ask follow-ups, they rarely ask more than one. Three times is pushing it, says Schieffer. "You can't ask a question four times. It's obvious you're not going to get an answer, and it becomes boring." But is it boring, or does it cause the viewer to question the guest's credibility? Last May on *Good Morning America*, FBI director Robert Mueller refused to give any hard evidence for recommending that the U.S. go on high terror alert. Diane Sawyer tried a follow-up question suggesting that by not answering the question the agency was perhaps playing down the warning after all. Mueller shot back: "Well, I wouldn't put words in my mouth." Then in an un-

usual on-air admission Sawyer gave up: "I know when I've been beaten on a question and a follow-up," she said.

Follow-up questions do fail to draw out new information when well-trained guests dodge them as easily as the initial question, and even interviewers like Sawyer give up before eliciting a real answer. On *Saturday Today* shortly before the California recall election, host Campbell Brown asked Arnold Schwarzenegger's spokesman Sean Walsh how he defined movie-set rowdiness — which is how Schwarzenegger had described his sexual escapades with women. Walsh didn't say, replying that his boss was putting out a

"message of hope and opportunity." Brown politely said that she knew all that and asked the same question again, adding, "What is okay in his view in terms of what many women seem to have interpreted as sexual harassment?" This time Walsh said that if Schwarzenegger had been "either bawdy or inappropriate or giving people hugs, that that is not something that he is going to be doing in the future," and eased into his message: "The bottom line here, from this perspective is, what are we going to do for California's future?" Brown did not ask the obvious follow-up: Is groping women the same as giving people hugs?

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"20/20" co-anchor John Stossel and producer Kristina Kendall won the 2003 award for examining the mainstream media's tendency to overstate problems like road rage and shark attacks in order to add an unwarranted urgency to their stories.

Entries are welcome from US-based newspapers, magazines, radio, television, wire services or online news outlets that are readily available to the American public.

Submissions for the 2004 award must be produced between Jan. 1 and Dec. 31, 2003.

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Reporters at times do follow up with pointed questions that clarify an issue, especially when the guest answers them forthrightly. When General Wesley Clark told Aaron Brown on CNN's *News Night* in August that the U.S. entry into Iraq involved a "classic presidential-level misjudgment," Brown quickly followed up. "What was the misjudgment?" Clark told him that the president had misjudged that going to war in Iraq would solve the war on terror, adding, "Seems to me that the only terrorists we're finding there are the ones who have come back in to attack us since we arrived."

Certainly, there are some strong interviewers in the business. On a *60 Minutes* segment in October, Lesley Stahl noted that the government's policy of giving tax breaks for buying SUVs for work purposes was encouraging people to buy the big, gas-guzzling vehicles. When Stahl said you could almost buy the whole car for the amount of the tax break, Secretary of Energy Spencer Abraham said he would not concede that was the case. That's when Stahl said there was evidence to show that's how the tax credit was being used. Abraham admitted: "Well, I don't know. We'll have to wait and see what happens." Stahl's pursuit revealed to viewers the administration's policy of supporting tax breaks for gas-guzzlers while doing little to pressure carmakers to build more fuel-efficient SUVs.

But in my examination of some fifty news transcripts, sharp questioning is unusual, raising the larger question of what the audience takes away when journalism appears to be little more than disguised public relations. Does the audience see through the culture of caution and obfuscation that permeates the news business? When TV guests practice question evasion, does the audience think twice about their credibility? Does the public see through polished answers and the platitudinous comments? Does it ask where the real meat and potatoes are?

Such questions bring up others: What are journalists for? Are they to analyze and interpret the news and arbitrate conflicting opinion for the public, or are they to act as mere carriers of other people's messages?

It's no secret that journalism has a credibility gap. Maybe it has always had one. But the gap is widening, stretched by media trainers who become more and more sophisticated and by journalists who try less and less to close it. ■

Trudy Lieberman is a contributing editor to CJR.

CJR LETTERS

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

Union until 1935, when he was reassigned to Berlin.

Barnes did not manage to stay inside Germany, however. He was expelled in June 1940, after reporting in the *Trib* that the Soviet-German nonaggression pact "appeared to have been liquidated" by Russian occupation of the Baltic states. He died later that year in a British bomber crash.

JOHN H. MCMILLAN
Salem, Oregon

Personally, I have no doubt that Walter Duranty is in hell, as the chance of a scam like him having arrived at the Pearly Gates for an interview with Saint Peter is unthinkable. And surely that good gatekeeper would never save space for this "journalist" in heaven, alongside the many millions of innocents whom Duranty falsely reported were not starved to death during the genocidal Great Famine of 1932-1933 in Soviet Ukraine. I shall even admit to praying that Walter is currently sharing accommodations with Uncle Joe Stalin, in a far hotter place than are the readers of the *Columbia Journalism Review's* winter issue. Finally there is some satisfaction in knowing that Duranty's ill-got Pulitzer Prize won't be doing him any good down there, not for all the rest of eternity.

LUBOMYR LUCIUK
Director of research
Ukrainian Canadian Civil Liberties
Association
Toronto, Ontario

APPEALING PICTURES

In his article on FOIA and the Vince Foster photos (*CJR*, November/December), Martin Halstuk erroneously states that FOIA suits were filed in an appellate court in Washington, D.C. by Accuracy in Media in 1997 and in the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals in California by Allan Favish in 1998. In fact, Favish's suit against the Office of the Independent Counsel (OIC) was first filed in a federal district court in California in March 1997, three months before AIM filed its suit against the National Park Service in the district court in D.C. The district court in California ruled against the release of any of the Foster photos; Favish then appealed to the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals, which ruled that

four of the ten photos should be released. The OIC, Favish, and some of Foster's relatives all appealed to the Supreme Court for certiorari. The Supreme Court heard arguments on December 3.

Halstuk says the government describes the death-scene photos as "graphic, explicit, and extremely upsetting." I told him that the government's description was false. No one who saw Foster's body at Ft. Marcy has described seeing anything that was upsetting. The first person to see the body thought he was asleep.

REED IRVINE
Chairman emeritus
Accuracy in Media
Washington, D.C.

HEAVENLY COVERAGE

Your recent Dart (*CJR*, September/October) aimed at the media coverage of the Billy Graham Mission to San Diego demonstrates how easy it is to misread the news from a distance. The *San Diego Union Tribune* coverage only reflected how totally energized this community was by the Mission effort.

As to the report about the rain clearing during the teen prayer rally: it was my quote you cited. People in the faith community appropriately believe in the power and presence of a living God. I was only commenting on what was actually happening. In fact, there was very heavy rain all around the community which broke "like a doughnut" over Qualcomm Stadium during the event. Once the event was completed, the rain re-started. Had you been there, you would have seen the phenomenon at close range. What caused me to make this observation is that this is precisely what happened a year prior for the National Day of Prayer event on our local waterfront. Participants reported rain so heavy that it was nearly impossible to get to the event. The rain, though it continued elsewhere, held off during that event too.

The response from this community to the invitation extended by the Billy Graham Mission was historic and life-changing for hundreds of thousands of San Diegans. If the coverage appeared enormous, it's because the Mission's impact was enormous!

DAN GREENBLAT
Past p.r. chairman
Billy Graham Mission to San Diego
San Diego, California

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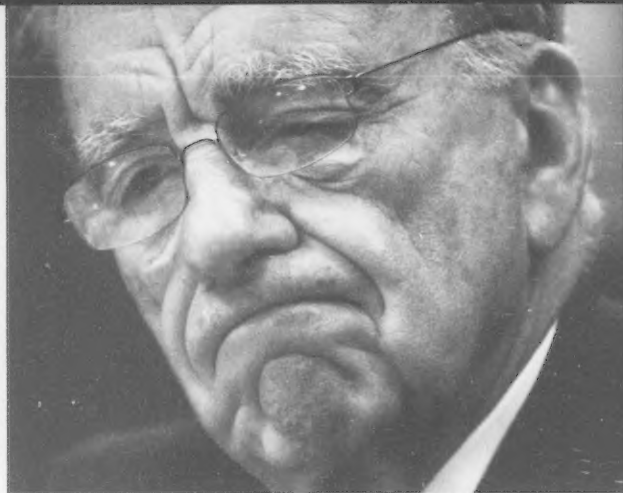
Topics being considered are:

- Communication and inter-connectivity: keeping Mom on your wrist;
- Can we get there from here? Future transportation and gridlock;
- My refrigerator is smarter than I am;
- Future family construction or, maybe, deconstruction;
- Education unchained;
- World population, migration and distribution;
- Who will be in charge here? Corporations, terrorists and nation states;
- GPS, cell phones and the absence of solitude;
- And the Ebola next door, global health trends.

There is no application form. You can apply by mail, e-mail or fax. To apply, send a letter stating why you wish to attend, a letter of support from your supervisor, a brief bio, and a clip or audio or VHS tape (if you're an editor send a sample of work you've edited). Applications will not be returned. **Applications must be received by 5 p.m. February 10.** Send applications to National Press Foundation, **The Future 2004**, 1211 Connecticut Ave., NW, Suite 310, Washington, D.C. 20036. E-mail is npf@nationalpress.org. Fax is 202-530-2855. Call for information at 202-663-7280 Ext. 106. **Latest details always on our web site, www.nationalpress.org.**

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Underwritten by a grant from the
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MOMENT OF TRUTH

*With the New York Post Hot on its Heels,
the New York Daily News must Decide What It Really Is*

BY NEIL HICKEY

The *New York Post*, after decades of swallowing the dust of the *New York Daily News* in the circulation race, is closing fast in a dramatic sprint, which observers of the city's rowdy newspaper scene are calling the most remarkable circulation surge in U.S. newspaper history. The *Post* has not been quiet about this. A May 2002 *Post* headline: NO CONTEST: WE'RE THE FASTEST GROWING PAPER IN THE U.S. The *Post* mischievously and regularly snipes at the *News*, calling it the *Daily Snooze*, "the city's slowest growing newspaper," and, giving its rival's slogan a nudge, "New York's hometown

newspaper,' which is printed in New Jersey." When the *News's* editor, Edward Kosner — a traditional-style journalist (*Newsweek*, *Esquire*) who'd led the paper for three years — announced on July 22 that he was resigning, the *Post* bared its incisors. NEWS IS IN CHAOS AS KOSNER LEAVES was the headline in seventy-two-point type. The staff at "the faltering *Daily News* was plunged into turmoil yet again yesterday," wrote the *Post's* media columnist Keith J. Kelly. (An accompanying chart showing the *Post's* circulation increase was headed: "You snooze, you lose.")

The *News* pretends not to notice, but sometimes it's hard. *Daily News* editors denied there was any "turmoil" at the paper, and reminded anybody

who'd listen that the main reason for the *Post's* growth at the newsstand was that in 2000, owner Rupert Murdoch, in a risky tactic, slashed the single-copy price to twenty-five cents, half the cost of a *Daily News*. Says Peter S. Kalikow, the New York real estate developer who owned the *Post* from 1988 to 1993: "You need a lot of balls to lower your newsstand price to twenty-five cents, but if you do it, eventually you're going to damage your competitor." Kosner puts it this way: "The *Post* at twenty-five cents is vanity publishing." Indeed, the *Post* — despite its circulation gains — is losing in the ballpark of \$25 million a year, according to some estimates. The *News* is presumed to be marginally profitable, with far higher operating expenses. (Both papers keep

TALE OF THE TAPE

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS

Mortimer B. Zuckerman
Canada
Martin Dunn
England
1919
Joseph Medill Patterson
'New York's Hometown Newspaper'

Earns a little

OWNER
OWNER'S BIRTHPLACE
TOP EDITOR
TOP EDITOR'S BIRTHPLACE
DATE OF LAUNCH
FOUNDER
CLAIM

PROFIT ESTIMATE

NEW YORK POST

Rupert Murdoch
Australia
Col Allan
Australia
1801
Alexander Hamilton
America's oldest continually
publishing daily
Loses a lot

their financial information private.)

For the six months ending September 30, the *Daily News* circulation was 729,124, an increase of 2.1 percent over the same period a year ago, according to the Audit Bureau of Circulations. That's not bad, but the *Post* jumped 10.6 percent to 652,426, closing the gap to 76,000 copies, its sixth consecutive double-digit increase. That places the *News* and *Post* in sixth and seventh place respectively among all U.S. dailies (after *USA Today*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The New York Times*, the *Los Angeles Times*, and *The Washington Post*). On November 3, the *Post* trumpeted the new ABC figures in a full-page, full-color article with photos of Cameron Diaz, Sarah Jessica Parker, and Beyoncé flaunting copies of the paper. The same day, a promotional ad dominated an inside page of the *News*, claiming that unnamed "cheap rivals" were chasing readers outside New York's city limits, but "only the *Daily News* puts New Yorkers first day after day." The *Post* has, in fact, sought readers elsewhere, especially in California and Florida.

In a memo to the *Post's* staff in October, Lachlan Murdoch — the paper's publisher, son of Rupert — wrote that the daily's losses are shrinking and that he expects it to break even "in the near future." Meanwhile, he added: "It is fun to watch our competitors squirm as we . . . take their readers, and their business, from them." *News* managers, meanwhile, regularly claim that the *Post* engages in promotional giveaways and stunts that artificially inflate its numbers.

The *Post*, in fact, has been so eager to perpetuate its rampaging momentum that on September 24 — in a promotional partnership with AOL and the Dave Matthews band, which performed a free concert in Central Park that evening — it gave the paper away to any New Yorker who wanted it. The *News* struck back. In a large, three-column photo the next day, slugged POSTMORTEM, a stack of *Posts* rested on a news dealer's bench alongside a *Daily News* metal paper weight. The



caption: "They can't give it away." The empty spot beside the forlorn *Posts* was "where the *Daily News* stack was, but it sold out at its regular price."

But the *Daily News's* most joyful moment in years came on October 17 when the *Post*, in a nightmarish gaffe, published an editorial lamenting that the Yankees had lost the seventh game of the American League championship series, and that the Boston Red Sox were headed to the World Series. As the world knows, the Yankees had won a famous victory the night before, coming from behind after midnight to prevail in the eleventh inning. The *Post* had prepared two editorials as press time approached and, in 200,000 copies, ran the wrong one.

WORLD CHUMPS! ANOTHER POST EXCLUSIVE, crowed the *Daily News*, which bestowed the "New York Knucklehead Award" on its rival "for ineptitude so breathtaking that it drew global laughter."

But a good laugh doesn't diminish the *Post's* serious challenge to the *Daily News*. And so one question becomes: What's a besieged newspaper to do when the barbarians are at the gates? The *News's* answer: Go out and hire a Fleet Street veteran as editorial director to march into battle against the *Post's* furiously competitive Australian editor in chief Col Allan — former boss of Murdoch's *Daily Telegraph* in Sydney — who has

been running the paper since May 2001.

On September 17, after weeks of speculation in the Manhattan newspaper world about who would succeed Kosner, the *News's* owner, Mortimer B. Zuckerman — whose fortune derives from real estate development — hired, or rehired, Martin Dunn, an Englishman who had run Murdoch's *News of the World* in London and served time on other splashy British sheets (*The Sun*, *The Daily Mail*) as well as editing the Murdoch-owned *Boston Herald*. Dunn's hiring came as a surprise to New York's tabloid-watchers. It would be his second stint at the *Daily News*; he had edited the paper from 1993 to 1996, then returned to media jobs in England. Before heading back to New York, Dunn told *The Guardian*: "The *New York Post* has been very aggressive. We've got to bring a certain amount of that back to the *Daily News*." His arrival on the scene in October telegraphed Zuckerman's conviction that British and Australian editors know how to conduct a tabloid war and Americans don't.

In another surprise move that tipped Zuckerman's new strategy, he hired the *Washington Post's* celebrated gossip columnist Lloyd Grove. So momentous an event was this among Manhattan's media tea-leaf readers that *The New York Times* explored its deeper meaning in a front-page story on September 28. FOR NEW GOSSIP IN TOWN, BUZZ AND DRAWN DAGGERS, was the headline. As the *Times* saw it, Grove would be "the new prince of gossip . . . the latest bid by The *News* to siphon some buzz from its age-old rival The *New York Post*, which considers gossip a stock in trade." Already in place at the *News* was the popular husband-wife team of George Rush and Joanna Molloy, who contribute a daily double-truck on celebs and their foibles.

They were all being sent into the trenches against the *Post's* presiding divas, Liz Smith and Cindy Adams, and the ubiquitous Richard Johnson, proprietor of the paper's so-called Page Six, the city's most influential celebrity intelligencer.

Grove's first column (it's a five-times



weekly page titled "Lowdown") on September 29 was a curious one. The lead item featured oversized photos of President Bush and his seventy-two-year-old uncle, Jonathan J. Bush, along with a poster for a "Remote Controlled Fart Machine." The president's relative, Grove reported, liked giving these \$12.99 "flatulence devices" — which produce digitally stored, button-activated noises — as gag gifts. Grove either was introducing a level of subtle irony previously not seen in New York gossip pages, or else he had no better lead item for his debut column.

Beginning last summer, even before the arrival of Dunn and Grove, the *Daily News's* front page had suddenly begun looking more like the *Post's* — more sex and more celebrities. Examples:

■ On August 14, over the logo, a suggestive photo of a couple lying in bed, and the head: WOMEN & SEX: THEY'RE HAVING MORE THAN THEY ADMIT.

■ Above the logo on August 24: THE BABES OF THE OPEN, pointing readers to two pages of photos of the sexiest women tennis players at the U.S. Open.

■ Page one on August 31 displayed a woman's shapely legs, a spike-heel shoe dangling from one foot, and the headline: GROUPIES: INSIDE THE HIDDEN WORLD OF WOMEN WHO CHASE ATHLETES.

■ Dominating the front page on September 3: large pictures of Jennifer Lopez and Ben Affleck, with BEN & JEN SET THE DATE. Eight days later, across the top of page one (this on the second anniversary of the World Trade Center tragedy): J-NO: WEDDING WITH BEN 'POSTPONED.'

Is this the right direction for the *News*?

Pete Hamill, one of two journalists to have served as editor of both the *Post* and the *Daily News*, and a New York journalistic legend, doesn't think so. "If the *News* decides to be more like the *Post*, that's like saying, 'Let's be more like the Detroit Tigers,'" last season's cellar dwellers in the American League.

Lou Colasuonno, the other man who edited both papers, and who worked at the *Post* for twenty-three years, rising from copy boy to editor in chief, puts it a little differently. "It would be a mistake for the *Daily News* to attempt to out-*Post* the *Post*," he says.

But the *News* isn't mimicking the *Post*, insists former *News* boss Kosner. "People mindlessly say that if the *News*



What can a besieged newspaper do when the barbarians are at the gates?

acts like a tabloid, it's imitating the *Post*. The *News* was a tabloid before the *Post*, and has been doing standard tabloid stuff, although with a big emphasis on original local and investigative reporting. Why shouldn't the *News* be lively? It always has been."

In truth, the two papers are as dissimilar as chalk and cheese. Murdoch told *The Economist* in 1996: "Outsiders, and even some insiders, don't understand the difference between the *New York Post* and the *New York Daily News*. They have absolutely different audiences. New York is a strange, tribal city."

The *Daily News* began life as the *New York Illustrated Daily News* when Joseph Medill Patterson of Chicago's Tribune Company family founded it in 1919; within a few years the paper was generating millions in profits and became the largest-selling daily in the country. It was the perfect tabloid, full of energy and aggressiveness. Its motto: "Tell it to Sweeney," meaning, write in simple language that the average working stiff will understand.

Persistent labor union strife drove the *News* to the brink of extinction in the 1980s; shutdown costs, because of wage contracts, were estimated as high as \$300 million. It's been quite a ride since. In 1982 Murdoch offered to buy the paper and operate it and the *Post* (which also was losing millions) as separate entities. Tribune spurned the offer and called Murdoch's notion "an anticompetitive and predatory act." The unions made concessions allowing the paper to survive, but after a 137-day strike in 1990-1991, Tribune paid the eccentric British media magnate Robert Maxwell \$60 million to take the *News* off its hands. Eight months later, Maxwell fell or jumped overboard from his yacht, *Lady Ghislaine*, and drowned. The *News* filed for bankruptcy. (The *Post*, too, at that moment was facing bankruptcy.) Zuckerman bought the *News* on January 7, 1993, fired hundreds of union members, and promptly hired away the *Post's* editor in chief, Lou Colasuonno, to run the *News* in the effort to import some of his competitor's swagger and appeal. Colasuonno departed five months later when Martin Dunn began his first go-round as editor.

The *Post*, meanwhile, was founded back in 1801 by none other than Alexander Hamilton. Murdoch has owned the *Post* twice: first in 1976 when he bought it from the banking heiress Dorothy Schiff, who had made the paper the most left-liberal daily in the U.S. It was the favored paper of Upper West Side intellectuals and Greenwich Village bohos, but many news dealers in the prosperous New York suburbs refused to sell the Schiff *Post* in the fifties and sixties, calling it commie propaganda. Murdoch quickly pushed the *Post's* politics to the opposite end of the spectrum. The *Post* endorsed Ronald Reagan for president in 1980 and, later, the Republicans Rudolph Giuliani for mayor and George Pataki for governor. Those choices made Murdoch a power broker in New York City, amortizing, in political influence, his investment in a tottering newspaper.

But Murdoch was after bigger game. He peddled the *Post* in 1988 to expand his world reach into television and satellites. To buy a string of TV stations, including New York's WNYW, Murdoch sold the paper to comply with a Federal Communications Commission rule barring a company from owning a television station and a newspaper in the same city. (Ironically, Tribune owned both the *Daily*

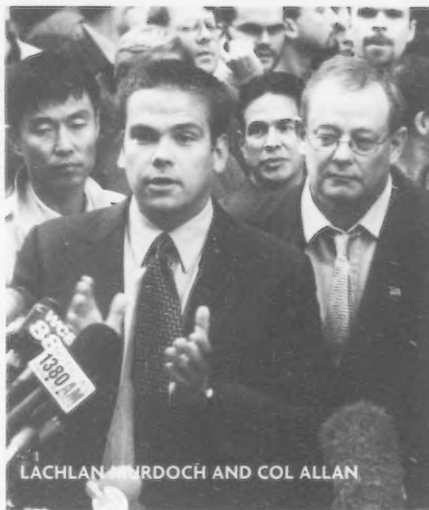
News and WPIX-TV under a "grandfather" provision in the same rule.) Peter Kalikow, a real estate developer with zero news experience, paid \$37.6 million for the *Post* — which was deeply in the red — after union concessions shaved \$24 million from the paper's operating costs.

Murdoch bought the *Post* for a second time in 1993 in perhaps the most chaotic and farcical episode in U.S. newspaper history. A plot summary: Kalikow declared personal bankruptcy and prepared to shut down the *Post*. A bankruptcy judge approved the sale of the *Post* to a mystery figure, one Steven Hoffenberg, Hoffenberg's company, Towers Financial Corp., a debt-collection firm, was under scrutiny for fraud by the Securities and Exchange Commission; civil suits faced him in a score of states. Joining Hoffenberg as a partner was Abraham J. Hirschfeld, seventy-three, a zany, eccentric owner of New York parking lots.

Together, they had neither the talent nor the resources to operate the paper. (N.Y. POST GOES BONKERS, said a headline in *The Washington Post*.) Before they could assume ownership, Murdoch offered to buy the *Post* to save it from extinction — if the FCC would waive its cross-ownership roadblock. New York's governor, Mario Cuomo, although often the victim of Murdoch's editorialists, went to bat for the Australian with the FCC. Murdoch got his waiver and greeted cheering employees on March 29 at the *Post*'s offices, like MacArthur returning to the Philippines.

The *Post* is now a fiefdom of Lachlan Murdoch, thirty-two, who says he hopes to have the paper in the black in three years. "We are engaged in the most exciting newspaper battle in America and maybe the world," he told Ken Auletta, *The New Yorker*'s media reporter, in 2002.

It's a big test for the youngster, who needs to persuade his father that he's up to the task of running News Corp. (\$17.5 billion in revenues in 2003), as well as the media empire's other businesses around the world. The *Post*, Murdoch's only newspaper in the U.S., represents less than 1 percent of the conglomerate's total income. Its advertising, while on the rise, still trails that of the *Daily News*: \$125 million in 2002, against the *News*'s \$410 million, according to TNS Media Intelligence/CMR, which tracks ad spending.



'It's fun to watch our competitors squirm as we take away their readers'

But even if the *Post* surpasses the *News* in circulation, it faces an endemic, structural problem that may forever bar it from a comparable surge in advertising. Roughly 60 percent of *News* readers purchase no other daily paper; the figure for the *Post* is about half that. Thus, department stores and other large advertisers can reach prospective customers efficiently by choosing the *Times* and the *Daily News*, knowing that the *Post*, for many readers, is a supplementary read and superfluous to their needs. *Post* readers, demographically, are just as desirable as *News* readers, but, alas, they're also folks who've probably read another paper that day.

One tactic that could free the *Post* from that economic box is to transform the paper into a launch pad for a national tabloid. Satellite printing technology allows papers like *The New York Times*, *USA Today*, and *The Wall Street Journal* to publish at multiple sites around the country, making them national news organs. Knowledgeable strategists claim that if the *Post* did the same, it might gain a few hundred thousand circulation and suddenly become a vehicle for national newspaper advertising.

In a speech in Sydney, Australia, in December 2002, Lachlan Murdoch said he was proud of the company's "ability to cater to all members of society. Our lack of loftiness is a point of distinction." Loftiness, in fact, has never been an aspect of New York's battling tabloids.

Each agonizes daily over the "wood" — the inches-high type on page one — so-called because in an earlier era the letters were carved from oak. The most famous wood is the *Post*'s 1983 HEADLESS BODY IN TOPLESS BAR. The *News* made tabloid history with its 1975 wood condemning President Gerald Ford's failure to help the city out of its fiscal crisis: FORD TO CITY: DROP DEAD. "We hated it when we had the same front-page story as the *News*," says Jerry Nachman, editor of the *Post* from 1989 to 1992, now the editor in chief of MSNBC. "We figured the reader was going to walk past a newsstand on the way to the subway and make a quick decision based on the wood. We wanted to stand out."

Standing out is becoming marginally tougher for New York's tabs. *Newsday*, Tribune Company's Long Island-based tabloid, sells papers in Manhattan, Brooklyn, Queens, and the Bronx. Also: Tribune launched a free daily tabloid in October called *amNew York*, aimed at eighteen- to thirty-four-year-old urban commuters. Then there's *The New York Sun*, a nearly two-year-old, politically conservative broadsheet (daily circulation 40,000) backed by Hollinger International, which sports a mix of national, international, and local news. And then there are a host of weeklies and a thriving immigrant press, in a city that now is more than a third immigrant. Not to mention TV. The *News* and the *Post* are battling more than each other.

The *News* staff's mood ranged "between dour and really goddamn depressed," *The New York Observer* reported in its Off the Record media-news page, as Kosner departed and Dunn arrived. Few had been cheered when management mustered top editors last summer to hear a critique of the paper from Iain Calder, former editor of the supermarket scandal sheet the *National Enquirer*. Or when Steve Coz, editorial director of American Media's roguish tabloids (the *Enquirer*, *The Globe*, *The Star*) was in talks with Zuckerman for a possible upper-level job with the *News*. (He didn't get it.)

The *News*'s faith in the selling power

of sex showed hints of continuing after Dunn's arrival on October 15. A photo on October 21 pictured a blonde reclining in a bathtub, apparently nude, covered only by apples, her nipples concealed by pasties bearing the name of an apple-flavored soft drink. When the headmaster of an elite private school (nursery through twelfth grade) was arrested and accused of attempting to e-mail pornography to teenage girls, the *Daily News's* page-one head on October 28 read: PORN MASTER. On October 29, the *News* gave page one to Dennis Kozlowski, the embattled former CEO of Tyco, calling him THE LUST TYCOON for a \$2 million, weeklong birthday bash — complete with guests in skimpy Roman togas — which he had thrown for his wife in Sardinia.

Veteran *News* people thought they saw some handwriting on the wall. Was the *News* planning to wage tabloid warfare with the *Post's* weapons of choice? Would it grow to look more and more like the *Post*, as the best tactic to retain its readership lead? Did Rupert Murdoch and his Australians have the only workable formula for appealing to big-city subway riders who already have their news "meal" from *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal*, and want a newspaper that's fun for dessert?

What the *News* needs to learn, according to Fran Wood, a former deputy managing editor at the paper and now an op-ed columnist and editorial writer for the *Star Ledger*, across the river in New Jersey, "is how to play important news on page one and still put that tabloid spin on it. Then you don't end up with J-Lo on the front page."

The *News* missed a chance to do that on October 10 when the paper's Washington bureau chief, Thomas M. DeFrank, in a page nine story slugged EXCLUSIVE, reported capital sources as saying that President Bush had "deep unhappiness with his national security team," and that Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld would be fired after the November election. The article might easily have made an informative, tabloid-style, attention-grabbing front page. Instead, the *News* offered an update on basketballer Kobe Bryant's sexual assault case.

Ominously for the *News*, the confrontation with the *Post* sometimes looks like a replay of the cable news war, in which Murdoch's Fox News Channel — with its videogame graphics and unabashed political conser-

vatism — has, against all odds, overtaken and surpassed CNN's viewership, causing the older, less flashy network to adopt aspects of Fox's style. David Cole, editor of the trade journal *NewsInc.*, points out that "No other newspaper in America is gaining the kind of circulation that the *Post* is. In a news marketplace, you have to decide if you're going to let your competitor do that, or compete. Mort may go downmarket against the king of downmarket, Rupert Murdoch."

Yet close students of New York newspapering think that these days, the *News* has the best metropolitan coverage in the city, including that of *The New York Times*. It boasts well-staffed bureaus in Brooklyn, Queens, and the Bronx, and publishes special zoned editions for those boroughs. Jon Fine, media reporter for *Advertising Age*, points out that "the *Post* leans heavily on columnists, some of whom are excellent, but it's playing a different game than the *News*. The *Post* isn't a daily newspaper in quite the same way, and that allows it to be more fun, more entertaining. That's what Zuckerman has to contend with. In a certain way, the *Post* is reinventing what a tabloid is. *News* readers, for their part, expect something more sober, more complete, and that's an expensive game to play."

Among the *Post's* strengths: some topnotch coverage of business and personal finance, as well as regular scrutiny of the worlds of big media and fashion. Recently, it launched a monthly section called *Tempo* that niftily reports on Hispanic culture in the city.

But when major local news occurs, the *News*, with its greater resources, tends to come out on top. The paper scrambled the jets admirably on August 14 when the city and much of the Midwest suffered the great blackout of 2003. Powered by a diesel-fueled generator at its printing plant in New Jersey, the *News* produced a comprehensive twenty-seven-page blackout special and printed a million copies of the paper. The *Post's* plant in the Bronx, meanwhile, had no electrical power, and the paper managed only seven pages of blackout coverage and 250,000 newsstand copies, using a plant borrowed from *The Record* in Bergen County, New Jersey. The *News's* victory was especially sweet because its plant has been plagued for years with

technical glitches; worse, its trucks must cross both the Hudson and the East Rivers via traffic-choked tunnels and bridges to deliver papers to Brooklyn and Queens. The *Post's* managers regularly boast, accurately, that their own newer, sleeker \$300 million plant (opened in 2001) is far better situated for fast delivery to newsstands and is perhaps the best plant in the country, with top-quality color reproduction.

The *News's* superior firepower was apparent again on October 15 when a Staten Island ferry smashed into a dock, killing ten passengers and injuring hundreds. The *News* deployed thirty-eight reporters and produced thirteen pages of coverage. The *Post* managed just eight pages that included two pages taken up by three wire-service photos.

The *Daily News* easily outsells the *Post* and *The New York Times* in four of New York's five boroughs — Brooklyn, the Bronx, Queens, and Staten Island. The *Times* is the dominant paper in Manhattan, but the *Post* is running neck and neck with the *News* there. In spite of the *News's* greater assets, former *Post* editor Nachman says: "I always found it surprisingly easy to compete against the *News*, which always felt it had to acquit itself for being a tabloid rather than reveling in its tabloidism. They had good stuff, but they never knew how to wave their tits. The *Post* knows that a tabloid is about fast women and slow horses. One thing I like about Australian editors is that they don't worry about what people think of them. Rupert has been successful not despite that, but because of it."

Can the *News* find a strategy to remain the more sober and substantial of the two while still showing a little leg? Maybe it can. By mid-December, eight weeks into Dunn's term, the paper's front page was noticeably more sprightly, with above-the-logo headlines on Halle Berry, the Beatles, Russell Crowe, and Victoria Secret's alluring lingerie, as well as photos of Britney Spears and the hotel heiress Paris Hilton, with the words ALL SEXED UP! But inside pages contained useful coverage of Washington plus a number of noteworthy investigations. Examples: a report on lawyers who swindled \$1 million or more from clients; an exposé of how drivers in New York who kill pedestrians rarely face serious criminal charges; and a double-page on the plight of tens of thousands of immigrants forced to live in illegal, deathtrap apartments.

PETE'S PRESCRIPTION

IF YOU CAN'T LICK 'EM . . .

Pete Hamill has been editor of both the New York Post and the New York Daily News. He is also a novelist, memoirist, and the closest thing to a legend among aficionados of New York newspapering. He spoke with Neil Hickey.

What do the *Post* and the *Daily News* need to do to survive this circulation war and make money?

There should be a merger. I know it will not happen easily. The *Post* should go back to being an afternoon paper. Then, instead of going up against each other in the morning, they'd have a twenty-four-hour cycle for news and advertising. They could sell advertising in both papers for X amount of dollars. Make the afternoon paper heavy with sports, entertainment, that kind of thing. The *Post* could then operate with a smaller staff, settle for smaller circulation — maybe three hundred thousand — and probably make money. The total circulation for both would be over a million, with the paper printed at the *Post*'s plant, which is superior to the *Daily News* plant. That would make some kind of sense.

But the political orientation of the papers is quite different.

There's no reason the *Post* couldn't continue to be a right-wing paper. If that's what Murdoch wants, he can have it a lot cheaper by merging aspects of the two papers instead of this endless battle to see who'll be the last man standing. Let the *News* have the blue-collar audience going to work in the morning; they're part of its readership. Then you come out around noon with the first edition of the *Post*, which has West Coast sports scores and the later news. Murdoch can still have his right-wing voice in the city. What's the difference if it's in the morning or the afternoon? Anyway, he's already got the Fox News Channel, which is much more powerful.

He seems willing to underwrite the *Post*'s losses indefinitely.

He's keeping the *Post* alive by the force of his whimsy. But you've got to look down the road a little and ask, What happens if Murdoch flies into an Alp on the way to some corporate board meeting of his far-flung empire? Will the people at NewsCorp. look at the *Post* and say, Hmmm — twenty-five million dollars a year in losses. Does this make sense anymore?

What's the long-term outlook for the squabbling New York tabs? The wrong assumption, says Ed Kosner, is that there isn't room for both. "If they were run like Gannett and Tribune, public companies wanting consistent profitable quarters, that would be different." But they're operated like private companies by two galvanic entrepreneurs willing to

compete with their own money. "That's capitalism," Kosner says. "This can go on for a long time. Mort will make a little more money and Rupert will lose a lot more. So what?"

New York newspaper buyers may be the winners. If you want to know what's going on locally in New York city, says the former *Post* owner Peter Kalikow,



GINO DOMENICO/AP/WIDEWORLD

So, with the *Post* surging, what can the *Daily News* do to stay ahead?

Drop the price to a quarter. But they're not going to do that because then they'd become a money-loser. For any increased circulation, you have to pay for paper, ink, distribution. Short of reducing the price, they have to continue to do what they're doing in terms of good, solid city reporting. It's a local paper, and has no pretensions to being a national voice of any kind, and shouldn't have. Also, the *Daily News* has to keep in mind that for many of its readers, it's a one-buy paper; people who buy it in Brooklyn and Queens, let's say, don't buy any other paper, whereas there's a lot of duplicate circulation at the *Post* and the *Times*. So it has to be a lot more comprehensive. People buy the *Times* for news and the *Post* for laughs. The *Post* has a lot of good stuff. I have a deep affection for the paper. I don't want it to go out of business.

Apart from its cash flow, what other problems does the *Post* have?

Its demographics are skewed, about sixty-forty, male to female. That's bad. Consumer decisions are made by women. If you can't get a paper to land on the kitchen table, which is where those decisions to buy toasters and things are made, then the circulation is partly hollow. The in-your-face style of the *Post* repels a lot of women. The paper is working to try to change that, adding features for women.

Do you detect that the *News* lately has been a bit more like the *Post*?

I did get a little queasy last week when the *News* had three T-and-A photographs of women, and then two beefcake pictures of guys with their jeans and their naked bellies. I think that's a mistake. That particular issue looked like they were trying to decide, Are we the *National Enquirer* or *The Advocate*? Features of that sort have no content, no story, no verb. It eats space that can be used for better stuff. It makes the paper feel emptier. So if you're paying fifty cents for a paper that gives the impression of being empty, why not take the other one for a quarter?

"you have to read the *Post* and or the *News*. You cannot hope to get it from the *Times*. The tabloid folks are on the money. That's what competition does, and while that competition is going on, it's great to be a newspaper reader in New York." ■

Neil Hickey is CJR's editor at large.

The Times of Their Lives

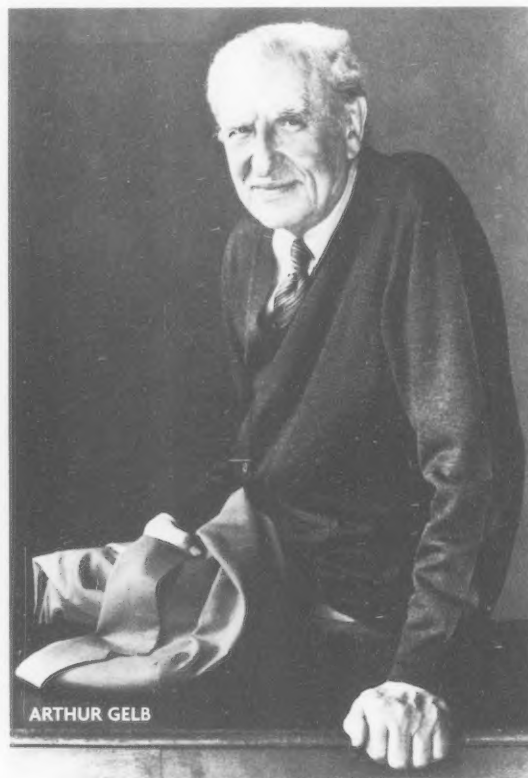
One with Love, One with Anger — Two Veterans Look Back

BY JOHN F. STACKS

I have a fondness for the stories of the newsrooms of the past, filled with smoke, redolent with the smell of dirty paste pots, the sound of the bulletin bell on the wire service machines. I spent a lot of my childhood in such a place, watching my father edit copy, listening to the competing phone conversations of rough-looking men and neatly dressed women talking to cops and ministers and undertakers, and, later, running election night copy back to the composing room. I was in awe of the Linotype operators turning pots of molten lead into lines of type.

For those who share my weakness, Arthur Gelb's *City Room* is a treasure. He was only eighteen years old and expecting to be drafted when he pitched up at the *Times* looking for a copy boy's job. A high school teacher had urged him to read *The Front Page*, and in the *Times* newsroom he felt as if he had walked onto the set of the play. There was an overwhelming sense of purpose, fire, and life: the clacking of typewriters, the throbbing of great machines in the composing room on the floor above, reporters shouting for copy boys to pick up their stories. He went to work that very night, at a salary of sixteen dollars a week. He worked as hard as he could; sometimes he would simply curl up on a desk in the newsroom and spend the night.

The place was full of characters and eccentrics. Gelb seems to have remembered every one and all the tales that were told about them. These portraits alone make this book a gem. His first managing editor, Edwin L. "Jimmy" James, was as wacky as any of the



denizens of the city room — "a cigar-chomping, dyed-in-the-wool newspaperman with a flashy wardrobe and a reputation for gruffness," Gelb recalls. A keen racehorse gambler, he used his clerks as bookies, as did other reporters on the staff. Once, Gelb writes, James had to hide from the irate wife of a reporter

CITY ROOM

BY ARTHUR GELB
G.P. PUTNAM'S SONS
664 PP. \$29.95

MY TIMES: A MEMOIR OF DISSENT

BY JOHN HESS
SEVEN STORIES PRESS
271 PP. \$35; \$16.95 PAPER

who had lost his salary on the ponies. When the wife called the cops, a copy boy sounded the alarm and the staff bookies took quick leave of the newsroom.

Another character was Meyer Berger, a legend, largely because he was a gifted writer, but also because he was a newsroom cutup with a trademark routine. "I heard a loud whistle," Gelb remembers. "I spun around in time to see the reporter, lanky, balding, and bespectacled, stand up from his chair, rub his hands together and blow into his closed-knuckled thumbs, again creating the piercing noise. He then leaped onto his desk and began a lap around the city room, jumping from desk to desk." It was Berger's way of celebrating the completion of a story. Today, a stunt like that would draw a visit to the HR people.

Women were a rarity in the newsroom then, but there was Rachel Kolloch McDowell, the religion editor, who always wore a feathered hat. She

worked in her own office on the tenth floor (the newsroom was on the third) and would visit the city room only on occasion, "eavesdropping for evidence of the foul language against which, as president and founder of the Pure Language League, she waged a ruthless campaign." She even managed to get permission to distribute anti-profanity literature with the company's paychecks.

Like many of the newspapermen of his generation, Gelb used journalism as a ladder to climb up and out of the insular and often desperately poor world from which he came. Many of the great *Times* editors and writers seem to have come from very little. It didn't take much edu-

cation and certainly no social status to become a reporter in those days; the pay was absurd, but getting a job was pretty easy, since few respectable people wanted to be reporters. James Reston was an immigrant kid who grew up in Ohio with nothing. Russell Baker came from similarly straitened roots in Baltimore. Max Frankel and his family barely made it out of Germany before World War II. Taken together, their memoirs show *The New York Times* as a great engine of social mobility and a magic carpet into the wider world of politics, the arts, and people with power. Every one of them loved the *Times* for what it had given them, but none of them loved the *Times* more than did Arthur Gelb.

Gelb's early childhood was spent in East Harlem. He was the son of immigrants from Ukraine who owned a small shop selling the children's clothes his mother made by hand. The family later moved to the Bronx, a world that Gelb recreates with loving detail: the wonders of Loew's Paradise Theater, "a beacon for everyone who yearned to escape to a romanticized world"; the Friday night dinners of gefilte fish, chopped chicken liver, chicken soup, roast chicken; the radio shows of Eddie Cantor, Fred Allen, and Jack Benny.

The Great Depression sent well-dressed men into the streets selling apples. Italian men played hurdy-gurdies while monkeys begged for small change. So once Gelb got his foot in the door at the *Times*, he worked tirelessly to stay there and to move up. Even before he was promoted from copy boy to reporter, he helped create an in-house newsletter that gave him and his collaborators the excuse to interview staff members, and of course to bring themselves to the attention of the people who could promote them. The inaugural edition of *Timesweek*, Gelb remembers, was July 18, 1944. He also used the excuse of working on the newsletter as a way of staying around beyond his normal working hours as the exciting news of the war in Europe poured into the newsroom. "I hated going home, afraid I'd miss something," he writes.

He naturally gravitated toward the theater section of the paper, extending the love for the performing arts that had begun at the Paradise. By the mid-1950s, Gelb was working under Brooks Atkinson,

the paper's elegant and powerful chief critic. His ambition then was eventually to succeed Atkinson. That was never to be, but marriage opened an even larger window into the world of the arts. Gelb and Barbara Stone met at the *Times* and promptly fell in love. She was the niece of the violin virtuoso Jascha Heifetz and the stepdaughter of the playwright and *New Yorker* writer S.N. Behrman. After an embarrassing encounter with his first finger bowl at Barbara's parents' apartment, the extended Heifetz family soon made Gelb comfortable spending the evening with giants like Heifetz, Toscanini, Horowitz, and Piatigorsky. With the family connections and eventually his job supervising much of the *Times*'s coverage of cultural topics, Arthur and Barbara Gelb would become major figures in the world of the arts. Even with a ferociously busy work life, Gelb managed to write with Barbara a major biography of Eugene O'Neill.

This book is as much a history of the city of New York as it is of the city's leading newspaper. All sorts of politicians and performers and charlatans make walk-on appearances. Arthur Gelb so enjoyed his life at the *Times* and so reveled in the richness of his home city that he scarcely left out a single detail. He seems to have saved every memo he ever sent or received, remembers every lead that some boneheaded editor ruined, every reporter who ever worked with him or for him, and each winner and loser in every staff shuffle during his long tenure. This is at times excessive and one wants to shout at Gelb, "Editor, edit thyself!"

But wading through the excess is a fair enough price to pay for the pleasure of the more vivid yarns and portraits. And none is more interesting than the accounts of his friend and mentor Abe Rosenthal. The two were so close that they came to be seen as a single persona, "Abe-'n-Artie."

Rosenthal eventually made Gelb his deputy when Rosenthal took over as metropolitan editor, launching Gelb toward the heights of power on the paper. But Gelb, who came to the *Times* a year or so after Rosenthal, had spotted Abe long before that and was immediately enthralled. "He was mesmerizing — like a virtuoso pianist or an action painter . . . His fin-

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gers danced over the keys of his typewriter . . . Those of us who observed Abe were beyond jealousy. He clearly had a gift that could not be duplicated."

The two men came from similar backgrounds and had similar temperaments and ambitions. Both were hyper-enthusiastic and very emotional. "When Abe cried, I cried," writes Gelb. They were not, however, completely alike. For one thing, Gelb recalls humorously, Arthur, the son of clothes makers, loved fine fabrics and nice clothes; Abe, when he was young, was a slob. Abe, Gelb says, "looked hip-hop before hip-hop." He would sneer at Gelb's habit of shopping at Paul Stuart until Abe became executive editor and decided he needed to look the part and became a Stuart patron himself.

Their friendship had a boisterous, boyish quality about it, until they became two of the most powerful men at the paper. In the early 1950s, for instance, after a good deal of wine, the two continued an argument that had been running for several years about the meaning of an obscure story by J.D. Salinger. The argument escalated until Gelb, in frustration, tossed Rosenthal to the ground and sat on his chest until Abe conceded the point.

Rosenthal was the more powerful of the Abe-'n'-Artie duo; Gelb married his own ambition to Rosenthal's, becoming his deputy when Abe took his first step up the management ladder as metropolitan editor. Gelb later succeeded Abe in that job, but not before he was forced to serve for a time as "acting" editor. For that disappointment, Gelb blames James B. "Scotty" Reston, the luminously talented Washington bureau chief who was so close to the family that controls the *Times* that he was often called "the adopted Sulzberger." Reston, Gelb charges, "had long been uncomfortable with the up-front, spontaneous style Abe and I had initiated, so inimical to the reserved, sedate mode practiced by members of the Washington bureau. And he was doubly uneasy with our close, forceful partnership that had contributed toward moving the paper in new directions, earning the enthusiastic support of [Turner] Catledge and [Clifton] Daniel."

There is no doubt that Reston didn't appreciate Abe's manic and rough-edged style, but Gelb was the least of his concerns. Reston regarded the New York editorial management as rigid and willful, gutting the best writing that his bureau of stars —

Anthony Lewis, Tom Wicker, Russell Baker, and Max Frankel — was producing.

Here Gelb, who has not an unkind word for most of the other people he worked with over the years, sails into Reston, carrying Rosenthal's water in the oft-told story of the struggle between the two giants of the *Times*. The battle was initiated by Rosenthal, with the assent of Punch Sulzberger. The plan was to replace the Washington bureau chief Tom Wicker, Reston's man, with Abe's friend, James Greenfield. Reston objected, and got Sulzberger to reverse the decision. Rosenthal was furious and Sulzberger brought Reston to New York to run the newspaper, and become Rosenthal's boss.

Gelb makes Rosenthal's argument that the move was necessary because the Washington bureau's performance was subpar. But in fact, the scheme was nothing more than a power play by Rosenthal designed to reduce Reston's huge authority.

Reston failed as the top editor and headed back to Washington, with Rosenthal named to replace him. Gelb was bitterly disappointed that he was not named

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as the paper's number two man, continuing his role as Abe's backup. Instead, as Gelb tells it, Rosenthal was forced by Sulzberger to name Seymour Topping as his deputy, leaving Gelb as metropolitan editor. Gelb sees Reston as again the cause of his frustration, and certainly Reston had tried hard to derail Rosenthal as his successor and then to insert his own man, Anthony Lewis, by then London bureau chief, as Abe's deputy. Sulzberger, it would seem, wisely split the difference, giving Rosenthal the top job, but, apparently thinking Abe-'n-Artie were too much of good thing, preventing Abe from taking Gelb as number two.

A few years later, Frankel, a true-blue Reston man, was made Sunday editor, again disappointing Gelb — who had been so sure that his friend Rosenthal would prevail in giving him the post that he had already begun making plans to change the Sunday paper. Again, Gelb blames Reston.

Gelb is as ungenerous to Frankel as he is to Reston, pointing out that it was during Frankel's tenure as Washington bureau chief that *The Washington Post* started to run away with the Watergate story, and charging that since Frankel had little experience with cultural coverage he was not a successful Sunday editor. But when Gelb does finally become the number two editor on the paper, he seems more disappointed than pleased in this account, apparently because it is Frankel, the Reston loyalist, who gives him the job.

It is not surprising that a man who was virtually joined at the hip to Abe Rosenthal would take his side in retelling the great fight with Reston. Still, one would expect that a man of Gelb's talent and news savvy would have brought a bit more perspective to this story. In fact, Reston's total contribution to the *Times* and to journalism in general deserves a better accounting than the grudging Gelb can manage. Indeed, the one failure of this book is that for all of Gelb's appealing story-telling, for all the precise and detailed research and recollection, he draws very few lessons from his long life in the trade and his privileged position near the top of the masthead. Gelb mentored scores of talented reporters and was, and remains, a fountain of story ideas. His take on the political battles at the paper, however, make him seem more a lackey than a leader.

Nonetheless, *City Room* is a wonderful account of life at the world's greatest newspaper. Gelb's love for the institution is well placed. "Can you imagine what it

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was like for an editor to arrive at work each morning, to look up from his desk at a sea of the most talented reporters in the newspaper world," Gelb asks. We can all understand why Gelb concludes his book with this simple statement: "Those were the happiest days of my life."

John L. Hess's memories of his time at the *Times* could not be more different. His is an odd, disjointed book, but is also an amusing screed aimed at the *Times* itself, its greatest stars, and many of the conventions and hypocrisies of journalism. Here is his basic conclusion about the newspaper where he spent his professional life from 1954 to 1978 serving as reporter and editor:

"Quality is there, to be sure, and it is visible every morning, like raisins in oatmeal, though one should examine each one before swallowing. Some of the Pulitzer awards were deserved, some were appalling. Talent is constantly attracted by the *Times's* aura, its clout, and its money, but for a recruit to sustain individuality and idealism in that mill of mediocrity is exhausting."

That last sentence seems autobiographical, and much of this pastiche of a

book seems designed to show Hess's own brilliance in contrast to the numbing constraints of organized journalism. Like Gelb, he whacks away at Scotty Reston, but he spreads his scorn more widely. Hess is actually fairly charitable toward Gelb, for whom he wrote an investigative series about the awful state of New York nursing homes. Gelb, Hess says, "shared Abe's [Rosenthal's] enthusiasm without the meanness."

Hess is of that generation that often wandered into journalism for the lack of anything better to do. Although this book is not systematic enough to give a real sense of who Hess is, he does say he had been a merchant seaman until his back gave out and he went to work for *The Bisbee Daily Review* in Arizona. "I'd never been a reporter before, but I'd never been a seaman before I boarded my first ship," Hess writes. "Actually, it



requires more craftsmanship to qualify as an able-bodied seaman than as a journeyman reporter."

Hess seems to have been happiest as a Paris correspondent and then later as food critic for the *Times* but he always struggled against the system. He says he was once so frustrated with the editing of one of his pieces that he shouted across the newsroom at the offending editor: "My name was on that story. You made me

look as stupid as you are!"

Much of this book is highly entertaining and all of it is brightly written. But if Gelb's book needs some pruning, Hess's needs some structuring and narrative line. Together, however, the two memoirs form a complementary pair of portraits, one loving, one angry, of life at *The New York Times*. ■

John F. Stacks is the former deputy managing editor and chief of correspondents for Time magazine. He is the author, most recently, of Scotty: James B. Reston and the Rise and Fall of American Journalism.

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Editor From Hell

Can a Newsroom Boss Actually Have No Redeeming Qualities?



BY BRUCE PORTER

Wherever old newspaper dogs gather to pass around the bonded whisky and reminisce about the golden days, one argument sure to arise is which of them faced the scariest city editor when he started out as a cub reporter. My own nominee would be Al Johnson of *The Providence Journal*, who intruded as a phone presence into the paper's bureau in Warwick, Rhode Island, where I started out after journalism school. The dread that Johnson instilled in us all came from the clipped and gritty edge to his voice, which gave his orders the sound of being issued through permanently clenched teeth. He also sighed frequently, suggesting his conviction that he was talking to idiots with little capacity to accomplish what he wanted done. Our impression was false, of course. In person, Al turned out to be a short, bald gentleman with glasses, friendly and kind, even a little shy, to the extent that, after first meeting him, we state-staff peons would invariably exclaim to each other: "That's Al Johnson?!"

As made clear in James Morris's biography, *The Rose Man of Sing Sing*, the archetype for all such fearsome city editors was Charles E. Chapin. For twenty years, from 1898 to 1918, he ran the local news coverage for Joseph Pulitzer's

New York Evening World; but in Chapin's case, unlike that of Al Johnson, what you first saw was what you got. With a face creased by a perpetual scowl, his eyes cold and glaring — eyes that Irvin S. Cobb, whom Chapin hired away from the *New York Sun*, described later in a magazine article as "ophidian," or snake-like — Chapin enveloped himself in the smoke of his ragged cigar and barked out orders from an elevated platform in the *World's* newsroom. He achieved

THE ROSE MAN OF SING SING

BY JAMES McGRATH MORRIS
FORDHAM UNIVERSITY PRESS
437 PP. \$30.00

some of his renown for the sheer number of reporters he fired, usually for showing up slightly late and with a flimsy excuse. The total came to 108, and in most cases, as journalism history professors are fond of telling students, the scenario started with Chapin's asking the tardy young man just who in hell he thought he was working for. When the reply came back that it was the *Evening World*, Sir, Chapin would snap, not any more you don't; you were fired the moment you walked in today.

The son of an itinerant watch repairer, Chapin left home at age fourteen to deliver newspapers in Atchison, Kansas, and arrived in New York via reporting and editing jobs on the *Chicago Tribune*



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Go Global, Go Asia, Get Ahead On Your Career

and the *Chicago Times*. In this account of Chapin's life, the author, a high school teacher from Virginia, has opted, unfortunately, for the vacuum-cleaner style of biography, wherein he collected every possible fact he could find, laid them out in chronological order, but chose to provide almost no context or analysis to help readers make much sense of Chapin's bizarre personality. An even greater obstacle to getting through the book is Chapin himself: He comes off as so malicious, so egotistical and cynical, a man with so little to like about him, that merely turning from one page to the next becomes a laborious task.

For one thing, he seemed thoroughly to enjoy demeaning his staff. Unlike the practice at other papers, for instance, he personally kept all the freebie theater tickets for his own use instead of parceling them out to colleagues, and when he couldn't attend some event, he ripped them up and threw the pieces into his spittoon. For another, the extent to which he distanced himself from the human suffering his paper exploited to achieve its large circulation extended well beyond the mythic hard-heartedness of the newsgathering profession. During the *General Slocum* steamer disaster, which killed more than a thousand parishioners, most of them mothers and children bound for a Sunday school picnic, Chapin was heard humming a gleeful tune in the newsroom, tickled that the paper had a caller phoning in an eyewitness account of every gruesome detail ("A girl in a blue dress struck the hood of the paddle wheel, slipped off and has gone under the blade"). When Mayor William J. Gaynor was shot in the neck by an angry city worker, a *World* photographer, in a famous news photo, caught him collapsing into someone's arms. "What a beautiful thing," Chapin chortled. "Look, blood all over him! And exclusive, too!"

Chapin presided at the *Evening World* during a historic period, when new technology was giving editors an exhilarating sense of their added reach and power. Electric lighting, which had arrived just a few years before, helped boost the evening papers, which could now be taken home and read by the whole family, no more squinting under gaslights. Telephones were brand new, allowing legmen to call in the details to rewrite and get the story into the paper within minutes. The afternoon dailies put out as many as forty "Extras"; their presses stopped running only to change plates. To get the latest news, thousands would flock to the newspaper offices themselves, arrayed along Park Row near city hall, to watch the headlines get chalked up on giant blackboards. During one prizefight in Nevada, the *World* deployed four-foot-tall puppets to illustrate the blows as they were transmitted by telegraph from ringside.

Pulitzer, who ran his empire via telegraph from his yacht berthed in foreign ports, referred to the *Evening World* by the code word "Junior," as opposed to "Senior," which stood for the more august morning edition. And to give Chapin his due, he had been hired expressly to do combat in the granddaddy of all newspaper wars, which Pulitzer was waging against the *New York Evening Journal* (code word: "Geranium") published by William Randolph Hearst — a war, like all of them ever since, that was fought almost exclusively in the gutter. But apart from standing out as distasteful even in this sordid milieu, Chapin managed to achieve the further distinction of being — and I hazard a blind guess here — the only city editor in history ever to murder his wife. Her name was Nellie, and as she was sleeping one morning he shot her with a .32 caliber revolver.

Leading up to the deed, Chapin, who also owned a yacht and liked to hobnob in clubs with the city's swells, had suffered severe losses in the stock market and was going to face embezzlement charges for speculating with trust-account money he held on behalf of a relative. Although he neglected to discuss the matter with Nellie, he convinced himself that she would prefer being dead to sharing his incipient disgrace. And to make it even, once dispatching her, he resolved to shoot himself in the bargain. Except that he changed his mind about that latter part, which is how he ended up with a twenty-year-to-life sentence in Sing Sing, where he died in 1930 at the age of seventy-two.

In prison he was lucky to serve time under the famous penal reformer, Warden Lewis Lawes, who encouraged Chapin to liven up Sing Sing's newspaper. Typical of Chapin, he used it mostly as his own mouthpiece, refusing prisoners' copy as unworthy and running stories on prison life he'd written himself under pen names such as "Bill the Burglar" and "Moonlight Harry." He also published parts of his autobiography, a work Irvin Cobb said was "mostly alibis and extenuating circumstances," in which Chapin sought to justify Nellie's killing as an act of mercy.

When the paper died a year or so later for lack of funds, the prison chaplain turned Chapin onto planting what became a famous rose garden in the prison yard, hence the title of this book. As word spread of his wonderful roses, some eighty varieties in all, thousands visited Sing Sing to see them, quite possibly the only thing he did in his life that gave real pleasure to someone other than himself. ■

Bruce Porter teaches magazine writing at Columbia's Graduate School of Journalism, where he is special assistant to the dean.

BY JAMES BOYLAN

A MIGHTY HEART: THE BRAVE LIFE AND DEATH OF MY HUSBAND, DANNY PEARLBy Mariane Pearl, with Sarah Crichton
Scribner. 278 pp. \$25

The kidnapping and brutal execution in Pakistan of Daniel Pearl of *The Wall Street Journal* occurred only two years ago, but this reconstruction by his widow seems to come from a remote historical epoch, those fevered months after September 11 and before Iraq. Mariane Pearl, then pregnant and now a mother, vividly captures the confusion and agony of her husband's disappearance — he was working on a story related to Richard Reid, the failed airliner bomber — as viewed from the Karachi home of her friend and fellow journalist Asra Q. Nomani, which became headquarters for the officials, police, agents, fixers, and hangers-on that coalesced to manage the search for Danny. She worked with them tenaciously, even ferociously. Her portraits of this polyglot crew are shrewd, vivid, and balanced, and surprisingly tolerant of their ultimate failure. Her telling of the story, sometimes almost minute by minute, simulates breathlessness and disorder while remaining detailed and coherent. It is no surprise that the book has been optioned for a film version. Looking back, she emphasizes the paradox that Daniel Pearl was the least reckless of journalists; in fact, he wrote a guide for his newspaper on protecting its correspondents in hazardous places. He had done his best to ascertain whether his last fateful interview would be safe. But of course there were no guarantees.

EXPOSÉS AND EXCESSES: MUCKRAKING IN AMERICA, 1900-2000By Cecilia Tichi.
University of Pennsylvania Press
234 pp. \$29.95

Cecilia Tichi, a professor of English at Vanderbilt University, offers a stimulating contribution to Pennsylvania's series called "Personal Takes." Her take is on muckrakers a hundred years ago and in the present era — or, as she puts it, from *The Jungle* to *Fast Food Nation*. The respective celebrity and ob-

scurity of those two titles measure the distance between then and now. Upton Sinclair, Lincoln Steffens, Ida M. Tarbell, and their kindred produced a body of melodramatic "literature of exposure" that is still regarded as classic journalism. Tichi nominates as their peers today Barbara Ehrenreich, *Nickel and Dimed*; Eric Schlosser, *Fast Food Nation*; Naomi Klein, *No Logo: Taking Aim at the Brand Bullies*; Laurie Garrett, *Betrayal of Trust: The Collapse of Global Public Health*; and Joseph T. Hallinan, *Going Up the River: Travels in a Prison Nation*. Her interviews with each writer make it clear that in skill, seriousness, and social intent they are by and large worthy peers of their sainted predecessors. Yet the new muckrakers are not part of a movement; their work may be read widely but none of it has caught the attention of the nation like *The Jungle*. The difference, Tichi says, is in our changing times. The muckrakers of the early twentieth century were adjuncts to a widely shared agenda of reform, a middle-class striving toward a better, more just society. The new muckrakers win prizes and even get on best-seller lists, but they work in a vacuum. Who, she asks, "might be the likely players driving new social movements?" The answer is far from clear.

ALL IN THE DAY'S WORK: AN AUTOBIOGRAPHYBy Ida M. Tarbell. Introduction
By Robert C. Kochersberger, Jr.
University of Illinois Press.
412 pp. \$21.95 paper

Sixty years after her death, Ida M. Tarbell has outlasted all her muckraking colleagues. She is the subject of extended discussion in *Exposés and Excesses* (above), was posthumously inducted into the National Women's Hall of Fame, and in 2002 was one of four women journalists honored on a new series of postage stamps. Now her memoir, first published in 1939, has been reissued. The title reflects the story — the long life of a woman who never stopped working, and in fact never had the means to stop. She was born before the Civil War, lived her girlhood in the oil country of Pennsylvania, drugged at the *Chautauquan* magazine, spent a long writing sabbatical in Paris, and then, for *McClure's*, pro-

duced the laborious, detailed reporting that became known as muckraking — most notably in her history of the Standard Oil Company. All of this and her long, less notable subsequent career — she became an admirer of tycoons and had kind words for Mussolini — are recounted here in a kind of deadpan. Even the breakup of the *McClure's* staff in 1906, which her diary reveals to have all but destroyed her, is recollected in tranquility. Here, one concludes, is a woman who never found a cause that truly engaged her passions, not even the woman's movement that now honors her.

PRESS BOX RED: THE STORY OF LESTER RODNEY, THE COMMUNIST WHO HELPED BREAK THE COLOR LINE IN AMERICAN SPORTSBy Irwin Silber.
Temple University Press
236 pp. \$59.50, \$19.95 paper

Until 1936, the *Daily Worker*, newspaper of the American Communist Party, treated baseball as an opiate of the masses. But with the coming of the Popular Front, the *Worker* embraced all things American, and put a novice writer, Lester Rodney, in charge of a new daily sports section. Rodney was a Communist, of sorts, and a deep-dyed New York-style baseball enthusiast. He ran an orthodox sports section, and joined the Baseball Writers' Association and befriended many of the game's stars. He says that Leo Durocher remarked to him, "You know, Rodney, for a fucking Communist, you sure know your baseball." There was one difference; he and the *Worker* campaigned for the integration of baseball — an issue on which the mainstream press and the baseball establishment remained silent. He was serving in the army in 1945 when the breakthrough came with the Brooklyn Dodgers' signing of Jackie Robinson. Rodney left the party in 1958 without much regret, became an atheistic religion editor, and at last report was in his nineties, living in California and playing tennis. This ebullient account is less a formal biography than a memoir compiled from extended interviews, and less valuable for its politics than for its incidents and insights about the midcentury golden era of sport. ♦

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VOICES, funded in part by the Ford Foundation, offers independent viewpoints on a variety of subjects. CJR welcomes contributions. You may submit manuscripts to the locations listed on page 4.

Colin Powell and Me

Tracking the Secretary's Crucial UN Speech



BY GILBERT CRANBERG

It was almost a year ago that Secretary of State Colin Powell stood before the world to plead the case for war. So compelling was the presentation that most Americans, reluctantly or eagerly, rallied to the cause. Powell's speech also won the minds of the editorial boards of the nation's mainstream press on the urgent question of whether Iraq indeed possessed weapons of mass destruction. Next-day editorials typically judged the evidence to be "powerful" ... "massive" ... "overwhelming" ... and "unassailable." Six months later, in a piece picked up by scores of newspapers all around the country, Charles J. Hanley, a special correspondent for The Associated Press, examined retrospectively, and point by point, Powell's specific assertions about chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons in Iraq, measuring each assertion against the counterposing facts that had since emerged. Under Hanley's lens, Powell's big speech looked far less impressive. Hanley's critique also noted that in translating a videotaped conversation between Iraqi officials, Powell had made it more incriminating than it actually was, as had been reported originally by Gilbert Cranberg a few days after the speech. Cranberg, formerly of The Des Moines Register, has continued to pursue the subject.

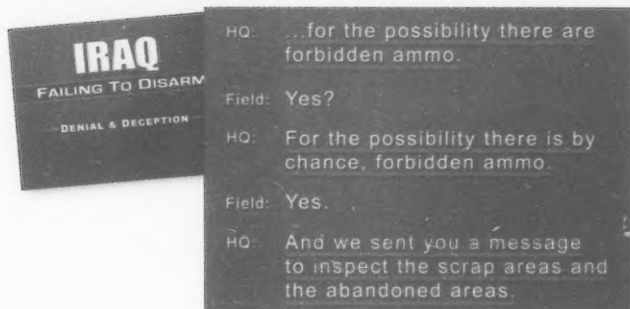
Colin Powell denies that he misled anyone in his February 5 Saddam-is-a-liar-and-menace-let's-go-to-war speech to the United Nations. That's odd, because there's compelling evidence that, at the very least, he fabricated quotes in the speech. Fabricate: to concoct, to invent falsely, to make up with intent to deceive. If Powell did not fabricate, why does the State Department give such a convincing impersonation of a cover-up?

Powell illustrated his remarks with audio and visual aids. At one point, he presented a tape recording of an intercepted conversation between two Iraqi military officers, along with a slide that carried the English translation of their Arabic words. According to the translation, an officer at Iraqi Republican Guard Headquarters instructed a field officer to "inspect the scrap areas and the abandoned areas" for forbidden ammunition; in Powell's hyped version, that became an order to "clean out all of the areas, the scrap areas, the abandoned areas." And to that, Powell added, "Make sure there is nothing there," an incriminating but invented quote missing from the official State Department translation.

Within days of the speech, I asked the State Department's press and public affairs offices to explain the discrepancy. Their nonanswer: visit the department's Web site. But instead of shedding light on the discrepancy, the site confirmed that Powell had indeed twisted the facts. In an op-ed piece written later that February, I charged that Powell had "embellished" the quote, and accused him of "deception." The piece drew no State Department rebuttal when it ran in *The Des Moines Register* and in a couple of Florida papers. Well, it was the hinterlands.

Four months later, on June 29, a modified version of my article was

Gilbert Cranberg is a former editor of *The Des Moines Register's* editorial page.



published in the Outlook section of *The Washington Post*, smack in the State Department's own backyard. In that piece I wrote that Powell had "embroidered," "misrepresented," and "embellished" the intercept. Again, no reaction; nor did the State Department react when an Associated Press reference to the bogus quote was widely published in August. So in September I revisited the State Department's press office for another stab at learning why Powell had put words in the mouths of the Iraqi military.

A press officer, Melinda Sofen, said that Powell "is firm that what he put forward to the UN was solid," and she referred me to his appearance on George Stephanopoulos's September 28 *This Week* show. That's unresponsive, I said, since, in that interview, as in others, Powell had generally upheld what he said about weapons of mass destruction, while I was asking about a specific misrepresentation. Sofen said the issue would have to be addressed at a "higher level."

Meanwhile, scrolling through the "What the Secretary Has Been Saying" section of the department's Web site, I found a September 22 Powell interview with Charlie Rose in which Powell declared, "Everything I said that day [at the UN], with the director of Central Intelligence sitting behind me, was supported by the intelligence community." So, next stop, CIA public affairs. Had the CIA signed off on the intercept portion of Powell's speech? "Go back to the State Department; they speak for Powell." When I said that wasn't helpful, public affairs explained, "Being helpful is not part of my job."

Back at the State Department, the "higher level" was Price B. Floyd of me-

dia outreach. Floyd disputed that I was a journalist. He dismissed my *Washington Post* article as "not an article, but opinion." As for my question, Floyd said that Powell had been asked innumerable times about the February 5 speech and had said each time that "he stands by every word in the talk." When I reminded him that I was not interested in what Powell has said about weapons of mass destruction but rather in the question of whether he misrepresented the intercept, Floyd said that Powell had been asked and responded to that many times. Prodded to cite an instance where such a question had been asked and answered, Floyd said he was not going to do my research for me. Floyd, responding to my reaction: "You don't have to yell."

In a subsequent exchange of e-mails, Floyd recalled that he'd told me numerous times how Powell defended the veracity of his UN speech. "As to your specific question about intercepts, maybe you should direct these questions to the Public Affairs Office of the Central Intelligence Agency."

E-mail to Floyd: "I'm left with no choice but to conclude that the secretary fabricated part of his February 5 report to the UN and that his spokesmen are either unable or unwilling to offer an explanation. Unless I'm given reason to conclude otherwise, I intend to write the above."

They didn't and I have, witness the lead on this piece.

Did Powell simply get carried away and overstate or did he deliberately mislead? Will the State Department quit stonewalling and produce a responsive answer? Based on my experience, if you believe the latter you will have a very long wait. ■

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My Conflict Case

Anderson v. Singleton: You Be the Judge



BY TOM ANDERSON

I pictured a courtroom with polished oak paneling, a stately gray-haired judge, and TOM ANDERSON V. ANG NEWSPAPERS emblazoned somewhere in gold letters. Instead, the room had shabby carpeting, plain wooden benches, and a judge who bore a striking resemblance to the actress Susan Sarandon.

I wasn't really on trial, but I had to testify against my former editors at a National Labor Relations Board hearing last July. The hearing was partly to determine if I had been within my rights as a Newspaper Guild member in asking the Fremont, California, city council, back in October 2002, to support a resolution in favor of the union's negotiations with the company.

My words back then had not persuaded the jaded city council members, who flatly rejected my plea. My nervous ramblings at the meeting, however, did attract the ire of my editor at *The Fremont Argus*. He reprimanded me for speaking to the council, calling it a conflict of interest. I disagreed, and because of this (and other complaints my union had), we ended up at the labor board hearing with Judge Sarandon. She eventually ruled that I had the legal right to speak to the council as a union member. But the ethics question remains unanswered: Was it a conflict of interest?

Looking back, I conclude that I might have done the wrong thing for the right reasons. Perhaps I was too caught up in the labor battle. I was a business reporter and did not cover Fremont per se, but some council members were occasional sources of mine, and I did ask them to support my union. But ladies and gentlemen of the jury — my peers — please hear my case before you condemn me.

ANG Newspapers, based in the San Francisco Bay area, is led by Dean Singleton, who runs the *Denver Post* and the *Los Angeles Daily News*, as well as some fifty smaller dailies and well over a hundred nondailies. He is a famous practitioner of skinflint journalism (see "The Newspaper Surgeon," *CJR*, March/April 2003). I did not know much about Singleton when I took the job as a business reporter at his company in August 2001, but I would come to learn the impact his brand of newspapering would have on the communities his publications cover. As ANG reporters, we were an underpaid, unappreciated lot.

When they complimented us, they called us "pro-

ductive" — as if we were prize-winning dairy cattle. Most ANG reporters make around \$30,000 a year. That sum doesn't sound bad until you consider the high cost of living in the bay area, where it's typical to pay \$1,200 a month for a one-bedroom apartment.

Low wages and high production demands limit a reporter's lifespan at ANG to about two years, and I left the company — on good terms — in November. The editorial employees were without a contract during my entire two-year tenure. High turnover and labor strife at ANG have a noticeable effect on the quality of local news. With reporters continually leaving, the paper and the community suffer. Sources have to break in yet another inexperienced reporter. Readers miss the nuanced coverage of reporters who actually know their way around town.

So I went to the city council as a *journalist*, concerned about the fate of community journalism. I could get a meager raise out of a new union contract, but speaking to the council had little to do with money, except in this sense: the union's proposal could help stem the turnover, allowing reporters to measure their ANG careers in years instead of months. More experienced staffs would mean better journalism.

At the hearing, my former editor made a valid point against my noble argument. He told Judge Sarandon that the Newspaper Guild should have sent a union representative rather than a reporter to speak to the council on its behalf. I agree with him. Most of us active guild members were in our mid-twenties, and inexperienced in union politics. It didn't occur to us to pressure our guild rep to speak at council meetings.

Journalism schools don't teach much about unionized newsrooms. Yet labor-management conflicts are part of doing business at midsize and large daily newspapers. Educating young reporters about the ins and outs of labor laws and negotiations will help them in their careers. And perhaps the J-schools should teach people how to push for the kind of wage that encourages young reporters to stick around a while, as they begin to know their town well enough to do some real community journalism. Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, the defense rests. ■

Tom Anderson, a freelance writer based in Washington, D.C., would like to hear your verdict. You can e-mail him at tm_anderson@yahoo.com.

That's Television!

The news is a stage, the stage is the news



BY GLORIA COOPER

Two swallows don't make a summer, of course, but still, they may be more than mere coincidence. In the space of seven November days, two small stories flitted across the air that, while seemingly unrelated, shared similar markings. Each involved the manipulation by a cable news network of a political debate it was covering, and the deliberate effort to bring showbiz values into the news.

As the Senate was gearing up for its marathon debate over President Bush's nominees for judgeships, so too was Fox News — as was made clear in a memo sent earlier that day by Majority Leader Bill Frist's staff assistant to his colleagues in the offices of fellow Republican senators. Urging them to "get your boss to \$230 on time," the memo explained that "Brit Hume at 6 would love to open with all our 51 senators walking onto the floor — the producer wants to know will we walk in exactly at 6:02 when the show starts so they get it live to open Brit Hume's show?" (The idea for a "stay-up-all-night" session "like those of yesterday" appears to have sprung from an editorial published last spring in *The Weekly Standard*, Fox's sibling; it was pushed again by anchors Hume and Tony Snow in an October interview with Frist.)

Meanwhile, CNN, gearing up for its Rock the Vote debate among eight Democratic presidential candidates before an audience of eighteen-to-thirty-year-olds in Boston, was also bent on ensuring a good show. Concerned that the content might be a bit heavy on substance and a bit light on sizzle — and no doubt aware of that dramatic moment in a previous campaign season when a presidential candidate had been asked a question about his preference in underwear — a CNN producer managed to persuade a Brown University student, who had hoped to ask a serious question about technology, to pose instead, and against her better judgment, what the producer later described as a more "light-hearted" question to the candidates: Do you prefer Macs or PCs?

However understandable the impulse, the temptation to direct the news in the interest of making it more appealing is always a dangerous business, and particularly so when it comes to political news. Even trivial manipulations can compromise the integrity of the news event — and further validate the public's

distrust when the manipulations come to light. And come to light they do: in the case of Fox, the memo was leaked to the Washington weekly *The Hill*; in the case of CNN, the used student described publicly what had happened, in self-defense against the exco-riations of the Brown community for having wasted an opportunity with that really dumb question.

As the nation heads into this crucial campaign year, perhaps these incidents can serve to inspire a simple resolution. Journalists might vow to remember that politics itself is plenty entertaining without any embellishment by them.

◆
This creep of entertainment values into television news, in one form or another, has been lamented by critics for years — the music, the banter, the haircuts; the seductive pull of celebrity; the corrupting drive for synergy. And so on. Little did we dream, however, that the crossover could actually move in both directions, that countervailing winds might turn the tide one day.

This fall, with the surprising announcement by CBS that it had cancelled its four-hour miniseries about Ronald and Nancy Reagan, that day arrived. Once it had been pointed out to the network by apoplectic Republicans that the movie failed to measure up to the traditionally accepted journalistic values of say, Fox News — not only, Republicans raged, did the movie lack accuracy, fairness, and balance, but (shades of Stephen Glass and Jayson Blair!) it contained "invented quotes" as well — CBS's choice was clear. Never mind the archives crammed with countless other fictionalized treatments of public figures, from FDR and Ike to Nixon and the Kennedys. And never mind the artistic values of dramatic license and creative interpretation that usually flow freely in such docudramas, both the good ones and the not-so-good. In a subtle twist of logic, it was the values of journalism that won the day. So of course *The Reagans* had to go, if only to another, more limited venue.

From that paradoxical outcome, observers dismayed by the implications of this incident, and the incidents described above, may take some small degree of comfort: between TV news and entertainment, a perfectly symmetrical exchange of values may soon, at long last, be achieved. ■

Gloria Cooper is CJR's deputy executive editor.



WAYS TO DIE IN IRAQ

BY MICHAEL KAMBER

I learned about the dangers of covering Iraq firsthand in late October while responding to a suicide bombing at a police station in Baghdad with Joao Silva, a *New York Times* photographer, and Dexter Filkins, a *Times* reporter. An eerie silence blanketed a crowd of hundreds as we got out of our car and made our way toward the bomb site. Suddenly, a man sprinted from the crowd and began shoving and punching us, shouting, "Kill them, kill them all!" The crowd joined in, closing around us, and then a hail of rocks and concrete rained down upon us as we ran for our car. In seconds, passive onlookers had been transformed into a frenzied mob trying to hold our car back. Our driver gunned the engine, nearly running down several people. In the backseat, Joao held a T-shirt to my head to stop the bleeding from an ugly gash.

There are countless ways now for journalists in Iraq to die: you can be rocketed in your hotel room, blown up by roadside bombs as you patrol with the U.S. troops, shot by those same troops in cases of mistaken identity as you film them on the streets, or simply killed in one of the myriad car crashes that litter the roads now that all traffic regulation has broken down.

And now, to the list of dangers, comes the terrifying shift by the Iraqi resistance fighters toward killing civilians, in an attempt to turn this country into something resembling Somalia. In a seventy-two-hour span in late November, seven Spanish intelligence officers in civilian clothes were killed, followed by two Japanese diplomats, and then three contractors, two South Korean and one Colombian. All were ambushed on major highways regularly traveled by journalists. On December 2, Ashley Gilbertson, a freelance photographer, was driving through Samarra, a hotbed of resistance activity, when gunmen in a BMW opened fire with an AK-47. He and his driver escaped unharmed but the message was clear: journalists are now fair game. Iraq is becoming a country where there is little refuge and where situations are increasingly volatile, impossible to predict.

All this is changing the way we work. Many journalists are refusing to travel in anything but armored "hard cars." (Security officers note, however, that the Spaniards were attacked with RPGs and the Koreans were in a hard car that the attackers blasted through with a heavy machine gun.) Other journalists favor small sedans and camouflage themselves with kaffiyehs as they drive the streets. Nearly all news organizations employ guards or security consultants at their bureaus. Some journalists are now riding to assignments with armed guards in the car. At least two journalists that I've spoken to are contemplating carrying guns themselves. "It's just a question of time before a journalist gets murdered here," one writer, who has been in Iraq for more than six months, told me.

This is the seventh war I've covered. I've had close calls in all of them, but two months in Iraq has created more bad memories than any other place I've worked.

There's the one where we're riding through a resistance town, the man in the front seat is a guerrilla fighter and has a hand grenade, the man behind him has a nine millimeter pistol. The hammer's back, the safety off, and if we bump into an American patrol there would be a bloodbath. In another memory we're skidding out of control on the highway at fifty miles an hour, heading into oncoming traffic after a bus is sideswiped and careens toward us. In a third, I am running with my hands in the air down a street toward the site where American troops have been ambushed next to a school. Children are screaming hysterically, the gunfire just yards away. An American soldier whirls in the turret of a Bradley Fighting Vehicle, pins me in the sights of his M16, then holds fire at the last moment as I yell, "American! American!"

He calls back, "I almost killed you." ■

Michael Kamber has worked as a freelance journalist and photographer for the past fifteen years. In 2003 he spent ten months on assignment for *The New York Times* photographing wars in the Congo, the Ivory Coast, Liberia, and Iraq.

The Lower case

**Justice officials
looking into
leak of CIA
worker's name**



AP PHOTO/KARL PRINSLOO

Greenfield (Indiana) Daily Reporter 9/29/03

Bush says he'll fight for constitutional ban on unions

San Francisco Chronicle 11/19/03

**Obesity
rubs off,
study finds**

The Cincinnati Post 10/15/03

Focus turns to space for new homes

The Tribune (San Luis Obispo, Calif.) 12/26/02

Lee priest on leave for sex with worker

The Berkshire (Mass.) Eagle 10/18/03

Traffic wrecks leave two dead Hammond residents dead

Post-Tribune (Northwest Ind.) 9/23/03

**Woman Found Dead in Trunk
Kept to Herself, Neighbors Say**

The New York Times 10/28/02

**School bans all kinds
of nuts on campus**

The San Diego Union Tribune 9/13/03

**Worker goes on rampage
at Mo. plant; four dead**

Employee's job reportedly in jeopardy.

The Express-Times (Easton, Pa.) 7/03/03

**STEPHEN E. AMBROSE:
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The (Cleveland) Plain Dealer 10/29/03

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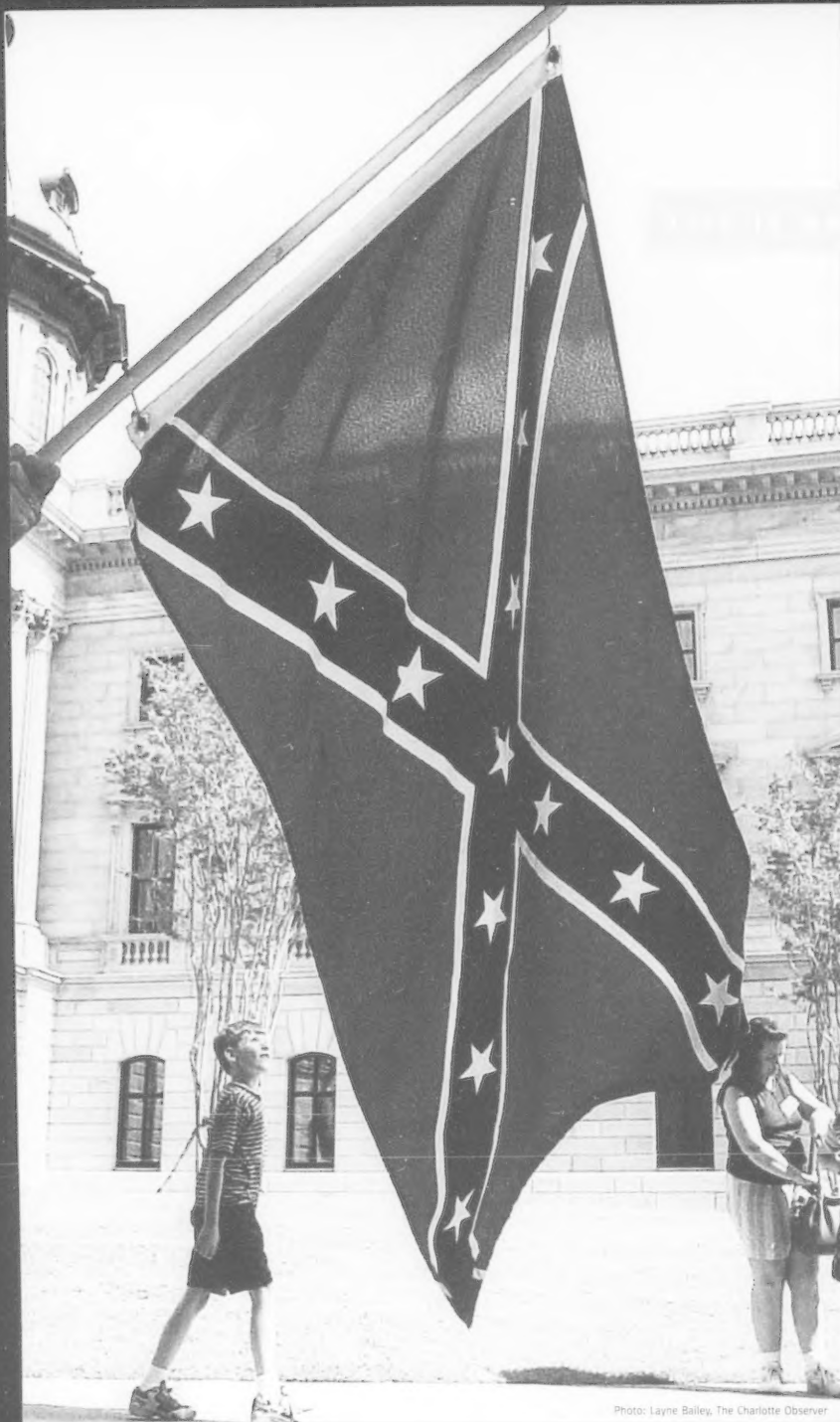


Photo: Layne Bailey, The Charlotte Observer

Not even in South Carolina, where a history of inequality and injustice placed the state in the middle of tremendous social upheaval during the civil rights movement.

But recent debates – from Confederate flags displayed on state property to school-funding inequities along racial lines – have raised the specter of racism in South Carolina.

To provide context, journalists at The (Columbia) State produced an award-winning special report detailing the evolution of the civil rights movement in South Carolina. *The Long Road To Justice: Civil Rights in South Carolina* captured for readers the people, the passion, the politics and the protests that helped change the course of American history.

The State's report, which has earned a spot in libraries, schools and historical societies throughout South Carolina, reaffirms the vital role newspapers play in our society. It also exemplifies the thorough, sensitive and balanced reporting that is a hallmark of all Knight Ridder newspapers.

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The Charlotte (N.C.) Observer
Fort Worth Star-Telegram
Dallas La Cumbre (Dallas/Ft. Worth)
St. Paul Pioneer Press
Contra Costa Times

Philadelphia Daily News
Akron (Ohio) Beacon Journal
Lexington (Ky.) Herald-Leader
The Columbus (S.C.) State
The Wichita (Kan.) Eagle
at Pueblo Herald (Akron)
The Macon (Ga.) Telegraph
Baltimore (Md.) News-Democrat
The Myrtle Beach, S.C. Sun News
Columbus (Ga.) Ledger-Enquirer
Baltimore (Pa.) Democrat

The (Miss.) Sun Herald
Detroit (Mich.) News-Tribune
The (Fort Wayne, Ind.) News-Sentinel
William (Barr.) Times Leader
Bismarck (N.D.) Herald
The (San Luis Obispo, Calif.) Tribune
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